DISCOURSE
CONCERNING
PRODIGIES:
WHEREIN
The Vanity of Presages by them is reprehended, and their true and proper Ends asserted and vindicated.

By JOHN SPENCER, B.D.
Fellow of *Corpus Christi* Colledge in *Cambridge*.

Liv. Hist. l. 24. 9.
Prodigia multa nunciata sunt, quæ quò magis credebant simplices & religiosi homines, eò etiam plura nunciabantur.

Baron. *Sapient. Vet.* Fab. 6. Pan. sive Natura.
Natura rerum omnibus viventibus indidit metum, ac formidinem, vitæ atque essentiæ suæ conservatricem, ac mala ingruentia vitantem ac depellentem: Verumtamen eadem Natura modum tenere nescia est; sed timoribus salutaribus semper vanos & inanes admiscet, adeo ut Omnia (si intus conspici darentur) Panicis terroribus plenissima sint; præsertim humana, quæ superstitione (quæ verè nihil aliud quam Panicus terror est) in immensum laborant.

Printed by *John Field* for *Will. Graves* Bookseller, and are to be sold at his Shop over against Great S. *Maries* Church in *Cambridge*. 1663.

UMI

DISCOURSE
CONCERNING
PRODIGIES:
WHEREIN
The Vanity of Presages by them is
Examined and Discovered.

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The Preface.



The most proper Objects of admiration in the Divine Wisdom are *the unsearchable depth and rich variety thereof.* Rom. 11. 33.

That admirable diversity of gifts and abilities of minde, vouchsafed to men to serve the necessities of those times and places to which they are appointed, that elegant variety of Beings in the world, that grateful variety of occurences, which the history of every age of the world entertains us with, give assurance that there is a *riches* and pleonasm (as of Grace, so) of Wisdom in God: as which (like some full word that cannot be delivered of all that notion and sence with which it is pregnant without variety of expressions) cannot be understood and made out without the large paraphrase of such a multitude of excellent instances and displays thereof.

And the faithfulnes of Nature to its Original laws of motion, the continuance *of all things as they were from the beginning of the Creation*, awaken a considerate minde into a quick and lively sense of the *depth* thereof. *Nulla litura est in libro naturæ.* God never saw it necessary (as upon maturer thoughts) to correct and amend any thing in this great Volume of the Creation, since the first edition thereof: which sufficiently resolves us, that all things were ruled at first by a minde that doth not *ad paucas respicere*, but that did look the whole systeme of the Creation quite through and comprehend at once the several motions and mutual aspects of secondary Agents, from the beginning of time to the end thereof.

This general constancy and harmony of Nature in its operations is not so much removed as commended by (those petty discords) prodigious occurrences, whose rarity sometimes commands our notices and regards. These are but the Anomalies of Nature, some temporary exceptions from her more common rules of motion; she runs sometimes against her bias, when the rub of some unusual impediment disturbs her, but quickly recovers into her more easie and native course. No kingdom is simply ἀσάλευτος but that of heaven, and no law absolutely immutable but that of eternal righteousnes. Nature is but *Ars Dei*, and so admits variety, but righteousnes is *Imago Dei*, an emanation from, and transcript of the Nature of him *with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.* Heb. 13. 8.

Now these *Errata Naturæ*, Natures steppings out of its more common road, have been received by the faith (phancy) of most times *tanquam Dei Feciales*, as Gods Heralds to proclaim his purposes of war and vengeance upon men; and as a kinde of recall prophesies of some impendent evils. It hath been concluded, that as *Natura libera*, Nature in its usual freedom, doth *declare the glory and power of God*, Psal. 19. 1. *Natura superata*, Nature quite conquer'd (as in a miracle) doth report

reports and confirms the truths and counsels of God; so *Natura impedita*, Nature disturb'd and hinder'd (which is a Prodigy) doth proclaim his (approaching) judgements.

The designe therefore of the present Discourse is (with freedom and sobriety) to make enquiry how far [illegible] may be drawn into consequence [illegible] counsels of heaven from them; and whether that [illegible] which the multitude receive them, be not ([illegible]) owing to those two credulous and superstitious principles [fear and ignorance] which usually manage and deprave their affections and conclusions.

Rom. 1. 19.

I readily foresee, that as to some persons (more easily moved by the common ayr of popular prejudice) Religion and [illegible] which will seem too much concerned in the argument, to be dishonoured to a question; so to others of more severe and examined principles, it will appear to hold too much of imagination or imposture, to receive the credit of a serious debate; and therefore had I designed no higher (in these papers) then barely to be publick, I should have made choice of some more obliging and inviting theme, and with which my thoughts have been longer acquainted. But that which thus far reconciled me to the Argument, was a regard to the *Profitableness, Pleasure, Seasonableness*, of a Discourse thereupon.

First, *It will (in designe at least) be profitable to very great purposes*, viz.

First, *To secure the peace and tranquillity of common life.* For if whenever the *skie is red and lowring* (the face of heaven puts on a different colour and appearance from what it usually looks upon us with) we must conclude some approaching storm in the state, every man must needs hold the peace and serenity of his minde by a very cracke and litigious title. How can a man (as he is counselled) *eat his bread with joy and drink his wine with a cheerfull heart*; if every strange accident must perswade him that there is some sword of vengeance hanging over his head (by a threed) ready to fall down upon himself, or that common body he relates to, in whose welfare every good man concerns himself? *Mens hearts will be alway failing them for fear, and for looking after the thing which are coming on the earth*, Luke 21. 26.

Eccl. 9. 7. *Si fulserit, si tonuerit, si vellum aliquid fuerit de cœlo, si ostenti simile, natum factumve quippiam, (quorum necesse plerunq; aliquod eveniat) superstitioso nunquam licebit quietæ mente consistere.* Tul. *de Divin.* l. 2.

A sense hereof gave occasion to the Heathen Poet (whose Philosophy or Divinity served him not to reprehend the superstition of Prodigies) thus to implead the Majesty of heaven for alarming the world continually with these direfull *Omens* of an approaching evil.

——*Cur hanc Tibi (Rector Olympi)*
Sollicitis visum mortalibus addere curam
Noscant ventura, ut dira per Omina clades? Lucan. Pharsa. l. 1.

Which words (that I may the better serve my purpose of them) I thus make English.

Why doth Heavens Lord foretell mens fate
By Omens? and so, antedate
Their evils; (twice unhappy!) must
Men take up misery on trust?
I'd yeeld *ex tempore* my breath,
Nor would I die for fear of death.

And

And (indeed) I understand not how many men could reconcile their secure and quiet thoughts to their vain perswasions concerning Prodigies, but that I observe their usage is upon any such occurrences to charm down their fears with such like words, *What these things signifie time to come will declare.*

Secondly, *It will also serve the honour of Religion, which the common reverence of Prodigies doth greatly trespass upon*; and that,

1. *As it detains men under a constant Pædagogy to many base and servile fears.* Whence Religion is easily concluded a great Adversary to (what it mainly designes to bring on upon the world) a true generousness, and universal freedom of spirit, and that its whole business is to subdue the spirits of men to some cold and little observances, pale and feminine fears. Hence men quickly grow weary of it, as of a yoke that continually galls them, and conclude themselves gainers if they may but purchase manhood with Atheism. This was that (especially) which gave *Epicurus* the confidence of thrusting God and Religion quite out of the world, and solving all the *Phænomena* of Nature without calling in any assistance from the power and providence of any Agent superiour to Naturall, even that bondage and servility, which he observed mens ears bor'd unto by the Religion of his times, which was nothing but a timerous and base observance of the Signes of heaven, direfull Omens, prodigious occurrences, against whose evil abodements, men arm'd themselves with (paper against pod-guns) a few bodily and ineffective Rites and Ceremonies. *Fear* binds in the powers of the soul, debars it the easie use and enjoyment of it self, and therefore the soul hates the womb that is conceived to bear it. Religion can never be amiable, till it appear designed not to increase the fears of men, but truly to cure and remove them.

2. *The superstition of Prodigies commits no small waste upon Religion, in regard the fears it creates abuse the minds of men*, proving generally but *è vitro fulgura*, vain as the shadows of the night. These Prodigies threaten a vengeance to we know not whom, and to fall we know not when. Now as the *pious frauds*, the false and timel miracles among the Papists most fatally wound Religion, because deriving a suspicion upon the true ones when once detected; so false and delusive fears introduc't (upon pretences religious) disparage and discredit all the true ones, and Religion is in danger to be concluded but *mendacium officiosum*. A using the weakness of some men to the service of the common peace and quiet. Religion is not to be dallied with, *non patitur lusum fides*. Pious frauds (as strong waters do the body) may perhaps help Religion in a fit, but (if used familiarly) disable the native heat and strength thereof. *Hay and stubble* laid upon a good foundation (such I account well-meant forgeries in Religion) will catch fire and consume at last, and leave a great stain and soil upon the very foundation.

3. *As it reports Religion a Systeme of some pitifull rites, slender and beggerly entertainments of the minde*: there is nothing more effectually enclines subtile mindes to Atheism, as the evaporating of Religion into a multitude of touchy and critical modes and observations. Which cannot command a reverence to themselves before discerning minds, which

soon see through them, they are so thin and airy. To dismiss this second particular. If these devout perswasions concerning Prodigies produce not in some minds any such sowre thoughts of Religion, 'tis solely oweing to the power of some happie principle in conjunction with them by whose activity the malign influence of the former is overpow'r'd and corrected.

Thirdly, *It may be of use to reprehend a very common, and Pernicious Errour.*

1. *A very vulgar and common Errour.* I profess not to know any one Errour to which all times and Persons *have* been so fatally abus'd withall as this of presages by prodigies: whereas there are some false notions which are *Errores Personæ*, others which are *Errores Sexûs*, holding of the peculiar temper, condition, circumstances of the Person or Age, in which found; this seems to be (in a manner) *Error Mundi* having been intitl'd by *Jews, Gentiles, Christians*, (some) *Ancients, Modern, Learned, Simple*; as will more fully appear in the sequele, and may in part by some few instances, which (to serve the necessity of the present Argument) I shall here infert.

2 Mac 5. 4.

How far the *Heathen* were leaven'd with this fond notion, the names and rites whereby they us'd to expresse any such Anomalous instances in Nature, is but too pregnant a demonstration, all of them carrying with them a promise of forethewing somewhat Future. (That which perhaps hath betrayed a great many to a like opinion of them, most people understanding little besides names and words) Amongst the *Fathers* (to do them right) I find none so expresse as *Origen*, who speaking concerning Comets, tells us it hath been observ'd, *that so often as any great and eminent changes happen in earth, such stars have been known, foreshewing the translation of Kingdoms, or wars, or whatever may happen of force sufficient for any great commotions and disturbances here below.* Amongst the more *Modern* it may here suffice to take notice that the first occasion and Original of *Rogation week* (observ'd now upon the religion of greater principles) in the church is by Historians (as we are told) refer'd to *Claud. Mamertus* Bishop of *Vienne* in *France*, for the averting of some judgements which (upon the observation of many inauspicious accidents and prodigies) were daily fear'd to be approaching. Among the *Learned* the height of *Grotius* calls my eye upon Him, who thus expresseth himself: *Silent multas veterum conversiones præcedere Comitia, gladii ardentes, Lunæ facies, &c. Talmudi.* As for the *common sort* of men, as they are (by the plainness of their state) more apt to retain a quick sense of those early notions *quæ sequuntur Naturam simplicem*, which follow Nature, simple and unsuborn'd, by subtilty, interest or passion, (for we find the notices of a God, of a future state, of the souls immortality taking faster hold of the populacy then of some of the more subtile and disputative Philosophers) so withall are more impressive those which follow *Naturam vitiatam*, Nature tainted and depravd with guilt and ignorance, and the many idols consequent unto both (amongst which this notion concerning Presages by Prodigies will happen (in its place) to be no small one, so that it may seem like some

Μονστρα, Οστενta. Prodigia. Portenta.

Βοη μεγαλοις τελεσιν, φαεσιγγελος, ἡ μεγαις μεταβολαις ἐπι γης, ἀναστενουσας τους πανυ τας ἀστερας, σημαινουσας ἡ μελλοντος βασιλεων, &c. Orig. in Gen. l. 1.

D. Hammond. Def. Liturg. §. 53. Gros. Not. in Matth. 3. 10.

weeds

weeds in the water, to have a very diffus'd and broad leaf but growing from a very weak and pitifull root, (generally receiv'd, but without) yea against evident and apparent reason.

3. *A very pernicious errour*, as having a most malign influence upon the *Minde and Understanding, upon Philosophy, and upon Divinity.*

1. *Upon the mind and understanding it self.* No two things do so usurp and waste the faculty of Reason, as *Enthusiasm* and *Superstition*: the one binding a taint, the other a fear upon the Soul, to which they (vainly) intitle some divine discovery; both train a man up to beleeve beyond possibility of proof, to deliver over himself (in a kind of captivity of understanding) to the confident dictates of the sons of imagination, to determine of things by measures phantastical (rules which cannot maintain themselves in credit by any sober and severe discourses) both inure the mind rather to divine then to judge, to dispute from Maximes rather vehement then solid, and place a man (if he chance to mistake) beyond possibility of conviction, it being in vain to presse an argument upon him that thinks he can confront a Revelation, a miracle, or some strange judgement upon his Adversary, against your conclusion; nor is there a greater evil then wickedness establisht by a law, and errour by religion, and an ignorant devotion toward God. And therefore no pains and care too much, to remove these two beams from the eye of humane Understanding, rendring it so insufficient for a just and faithfull discovery of objects in Religion or common science.

Pessimum est & plane pestis & tabes intellectus si vanis accedat veneratio. Verul. descr. Glob. intel. c. 6.

2. *Upon Philosophy.* For when once Superstition hath advanced these Prodigies into the repute of divine messengers, it will easily be inferr'd a necessary respect towards them to keep some distance, and not to approach them too nearly by too busy and curious an enquiry into their natural and immediate causes. We find among the *Grecians* those which first made a tender of the natural causes of lightnings and tempests to the (as yet) rude ears of men, were presently blasted with the reproach of Atheists; as if to shew how many wheels, in some great Engine, move in subordination to the production of some great work, were to obscure and ecclypse the art of the Artificer.

De Divin. l. 2.

3. *Upon Divinity also*; Because the conceit conciliates reverence to a lie, and christens the vain and soft fears of ignorance by the name of prudent foresights and religious observances of God; whence the soul is brought (like some of the ancient Heathens) to give worship to its very passions and diseases. Stories of Prodigies may perhaps serve to deceive the *fancies* of a winter night but when once they advance (*a foco ad Aras*) from the chimney corner to the Church, and are adopted the measures of a religious faith or fear, advance the serious motives of Repentance 'tis time to throw contempt upon them. A lie never did, never could serve the interest of truth

The Church of *Rome* (whether to serve the interest of Philosophy or Divinity, I shall not here concern my self to enquire) hath expresst her self (*fas est & ab hoste doceri*) by her representatives a great

adversary

adversary to this instance of superstition, the observation of portentous accidents. We find in the Catalogue of books prohibited by *Urban.* viii. this interdicted among the rest, *Author Chronici prodigiorum & ostentorum ab exordio Mundi usque ad An.* 1557. And *Gregory the Great* (represented to posterity as one most studious of the propagation of the Christian Religion) was acted by so great a zeal against it, that we are told he took care for the extirpation of that (otherwise) excellent Historian [*Livy*] out of all Libraries, *ob tam frequentem & accuratam portentorum enumerationem*, for his so frequent and curious enumeration of all the *Portenta* which seem'd to attend any great Action. Though I think too hasty and severe a judgement past upon that Historian, whom we shall easily perceive, not more leaven'd (in mind) with that kind of superstition, then *Herodotus* or *Tacitus*, and others which stood in no better light then he did. However much may be pardon'd to a great zeal to a good undertaking. The mind of man was made for Truth and Goodness, and therefore should not in any matter (if the remedy fall within our compass) be put off with the bare form and idol of either; But where an errour hath once ceas'd it, which is (what some say of a comet) both *malum & causa mali*, an evil and a pregnant cause of evils, no need then of the voice of thunder to awaken charity to endeavour (as it can) its remedy and removal.

Casaub. Epist. dedic. in Polyb.

De Divin. l. 2.

Thirdly, *This Discourse may be profitable to serve the just interest of State*, and that;

1. *As it tends to secure the honour of Acts of State and the results of publick counsel.* How mean a value and regard shall the issues of the severest debates, and the commands of Authority, find, if every pitifull Prodigy-monger have credit enough with the People to blast them, by telling them that heaven frowns upon them, and that God writes his displeasure against them, in black and visible characters, when some sad Accident befalls the complyers with them?

2. *As it tends to make men more manageable to the commands of Authority*, which easy men may quickly be frighted from by such images of straw, as the relations of monsters and strange sights are. Of what ill consequence the *Romanes* at last found the observation of signes and *Omens* to be (in War especially) appears from what *Tully* hath left recorded viz. that however they were in his time *ab Urbanis retenta*, retain'd in some repute, with the Citizens, (for good reasons of State) yet they were *a bellicis sublata*, quite baniſht the camp, because they found that the ignorant multitude (like beasts) would not drive well, if any such bug-bears were suffered to lie before them. Now where weak men (like the horse of *Alexander*) are ready to start and fly off from their Rulers and Guides, because frighted with shadows, 'tis but a charity to them and the publick to turn them to the Sun, to lead them to the light by a faithfull information of their judgements.

3. *As it ministers to the quiet and tranquillity of the State.* That man that hath already incircled his own head with a *Glory* and is strongly perswaded that Gods honour and the Gospel stand or fall with his private

private Opinion, will need no great Rhetorick to perſwade him to receive a prodigy as a ſign from heaven to encourage any endeavours to advance it. Propheſies concerning the deaths of great perſons, or changes in the State, (a kind of weak ayr which carries about and commands but the more chaffie and lighter faiths) the wiſdom of the Nation hath judg'd of ſuch evil conſequence in a State, as by two ſeveral Acts of Parliament (under ſevere penalties) to interdict the publication of them. Now Prodigies have ever been propos'd as a kind of types and real Propheſies of ſome black days, and ſome wonderfull alterations at hand; and therefore may eaſily be preſum'd to have as malign an influence upon the people (apt to be mightily mov'd with what ever comes toward them with any ſhadow and promiſe of Divine and Sacred) as the former. Stat. 3 Edw. 6. c. 15. Stat. 5 Eliz. c. 15.

Among the Ancient Romanes ſubtil Stateſmen made uſe of that Superſtitious obſervation of *Omens* and *Prodigies*, (to which they ſaw the people, in the ruder ages eſpecially ſo invincibly addicted) to act and manage them to what perſwaſions might beſt ſerve the neceſſities of State; to which purpoſe they had their *Collegia Vatum*, Publick Diviners, who knew to bend theſe Offer accidents (as the *Mufti* can doe the *Alcoran*) to ſuch a ſence and ſignification as might make the eaſie multitude manageable to the purpoſes and deſigns of their Rulers. And 'twere to be wiſht that ſome Chriſtians had not ſince tranſcrib'd the copy of this Ethnick example, and endeavour'd to ſerve ſome ſecular ends upon the credulity and ſuperſtition of the multitude, by the tendring of any ſuch Prodigies, or Prophecies to their hopes or fears. All that I ſhall add further in this place, is this. He that alledgeth barely the Spirit of God to juſtifie an Opinion in Religion may thank himſelf, if he periſh in the other World; and he that quotes onely a Prodigy in Nature to encourage any ſedition in State, may thank himſelf if he periſh in this.

Secondly, *This Diſcourſe* (without oweing much to the Author) *will be pregnant with pleaſure and delight.* For things rare and unuſual (the ſubject thereof) call forth the Soul to a very quick and grateſull attendance, whilſt matters of greater worth and moment, of more familiar occurrence, (like things often handled and blown upon) looſe their value and luſtre in its eye. Now the contemplation of things new and ſtrange, gives the Soul ſo high a pleaſure;

1. *Becauſe they prove the occaſions of wonder and admiration,* which the *Philoſopher* ranks among the τὰ ἡδέα, things pleaſant and delightfull; becauſe (ſaith He) admiration comes attended with a tacite deſire of learning [more fully the nature and cauſes of its object] though I rather think, becauſe admiration is (as the Lord *Verulam* well ſtiles it) *abrupta quædam ſcientia*, an Eſſay to knowledge, beſides we ſhall obſerve that the acts of the Soul which are intenſe, and call it much off from it ſelf, [as profound contemplations, great joys, ecſtacies a great love, and ſo, high admirations] create it a moſt chaſt and refin'd pleaſure. Τὸ μανθάνειν καὶ τὸ θαυμάζειν ἡδὺ ὡς ὁπὶ τὸ πολύ· ἐν ᾧ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν τὸ ἐπιθυμεῖν [μαθεῖν] ἔστιν Ariſt. Rhet. l. 1. c. 11.

2. *Becauſe Objects not as yet fully known* (as objects rare and ſtrange are) *keep the Soul in a State of hope and expectation of ſome huge ſatisfaction*

in a greater intimacy and acquaintance with them. Now (as to this Worlds heaven) the *Viatores* (because improving their felicities by an active phancy) are usually more happy then the *comprehensores.*

3. Because the Soul of Man affects a kinde of infinity in its objects. The affections are alway reaching after new pleasures, the desires are carried forth after new possessions, phancy is perpetually entertaining the minde with new *Ideas*, the Understanding is continually calling for a new Scene of contemplations. *Scaliger* alledgeth this reason of the delight men naturally take in fables, the pictures of Anticks, and Monsters, (things rare and extraordinary) even because they exceed the common limits of truth, and mend the prospect of the Soul; which by its unconfin'd desires and motions gives it self to understand, that it is of higher extraction then that of a beast, and cannot truly compose and enjoy it self but in Union with God, the infinite Ocean of truth and Goodness.

Mens nostra à fabulis & monstrorum picturis, capit Voluptatem, propterea quod exuperant vulgares limites veritatis, &c. aspernatur enim certorum finium præscriptionem. Exerc. 307. §. 11.

Thirdly, That which further engag'd my thoughts upon this Argument, was a consideration of the *Seasonableness thereof.* We have been of late perswaded by three or four several impressions of Books (as there never wanted those which would farme the weakness and easiness of the multitude) that *England* is grown *Africa*, and presents us every year (since the Return of his Majesty) with a new Scene of Monstrous and strange sights, and that our lot is fallen into an Age of Wonders; and all held forth to the People (like black clouds before a storm), the harbingers of some strange and unusual plagues approaching in the State. A matter not much to be wondred at, when the Nation (like the Womb of *Rebekah*) carries such striving and contesting Parties.

De sapient. Vet. c. 9.

The Poets feign the Giants (the sons of *Earth*) to have bidden battel to the Gods, and to have perisht by a thunderbolt in the confidence of that attempt. And the *Earth* (their Mother) to avenge the death of her Sons, to have brought forth their last Sister, Fame. A fable expounded by the excellent *Verulam*, of unquiet and seditious persons (a kind of *Filii Terræ*, the creatures of the People, usually envious against their Rulers, and soon weary of the present State of things) who when crusht and ruin'd in their attempts against the Gods on earth (their rightfull Governours) their fall is aveng'd by a *fama querula & seditiosa*, popular clamours, libels, odious representations of them to derive upon them the common envy, with which may be number'd the reports of strange prodigies and prophecies giving hopes of some approaching change of affairs (an observation which I am sure will offend none that are studious of the Sacred character, Persons *which are quiet in the land.*)

Psal. 35. 20.

To all that hath been hitherto discourst concerning the profit, pleasure, seasonableness of the Argument before us, I shall superadd this one consideration to excuse the trouble these papers give the Reader. A hasty, ignorant, rash rejection of things which obtain (though unworthily) the place and repute of religious and sacred, (as prodigies doe) gives no small advantage to Atheism. An over-

hasty

hasty pulling off (even) the wens and excrescencies from the body of Religion, may prove of as bad consequence, as a permitting them still to grow upon it. As our Saviour would not be call'd *Good* in an ignorant courtesie, so neither should these Prodigies, *Vain*, in an ignorant scorn: He that (without light and resolution) slights and neglects things, but presum'd sacred and religious, is but a more fortunate Atheist, and more harmlesly profane. Look as (sometimes) Persons once Sacred, found guilty of capital crimes, are solemnly degraded, before they are executed; so things once reputed Sacred, should be first degraded (by a well inform'd judgment) from that Opinion and degree of respect they held in mens minds, before they be thrown off, and deliver'd to their neglect and disregard.

And this is all that that I thought necessary to premise, to level the way to a fairer reception and interpretation of the ensuing Discourse.

J. S.

UMI

A DISCOURSE Concerning PRODIGIES:

Wherein the Vanity of Presages by them is reprehended, and their true and proper Ends asserted and vindicated.

CHAP. I.

Concerning the several kinds of Prodigies.

Great wonders of divine efficiency alone: these divided into Ordinary and Extraordinary. The kinds of the former touch't upon. Wonders extraordinary (comprised under the general name of Prodigies) divided into Signal *and* Penal. *The use of that phrase excused. Prodigies* Signal. *Natural, Praternatural, Supernatural, what. The Prodigies related in the Ethnick Stories, excluded this number, and why. Prodigies* Penal *described.*

IT is the Prerogative Royal of the King of heaven, that He *onely doeth great wonders*, commands Nature to what actions, into what posture, may best serve the ends of his own honour and wisdom. The biggest works the devil doeth, have but a tympany of greatness, are a kinde of practical fallacies; as he is but *Simia Dei*, so the greatest work which falls within his compass, is but *Simia Miraculi*, and owes the wonder it meets with, not to its own real greatness, but our Ignorance. Psa. 136. 4.

Now these wonders are either *Ordinary* or *Extraordinary*.

First, There are some of his wonders of *Ordinary and constant residence* (a kinde of more remarkable passages in the Book of Nature) such as are,

1. The

1. The *Monadica Naturæ*, By which I take leave to underſtand (at preſent) thoſe works in Nature which are of ſo private and peculiar a make and character, that they ſtand almoſt alone, and hardly admit their pattern in the whole Syſteme of the Creation, ſuch as are boyling ſprings, flaming mountains, petrifying waters, vaſt chaſms and hiatus in the Earth, *&c.* the inſtances whereof are ſo various, that there is no countrey but hath its *miranda*, which call upon it to pay the conſtant tribute of a deliberate and judicious admiration to him, who ſeems to inſcribe his own name [Wonderfull] upon all theſe works of his.

Iſa. 9. 6.

2. The *Luſus Naturæ*, (as I may ſtyle them) the diſports of Nature; ſuch works wherein the hand of Nature breaks and divides (as it were) the plain ground of ſome common nature into an elegant variety of Individuals, different in ſhape and temper; as is ſeen in dogs and roſes, *&c.* as alſo thoſe works wherein (becauſe delighted as much with conſent as variety) *ſe ſequitur q; fugit q;* ſhe ſeems to follow and fly from her ſelf both at once, aping and imitating her own works, in one element, by ſome ſimilar figures or diſpoſitions; in different pieces of the creation, in another: (which ſerve as a kinde of gratefull repeats in the harmony of the world.)

3. The *Varietates Naturæ*, elegant and copious varieties of Nature, appearing in the various ſpecies of things, which different countreys ſo entertain the curioſities of each other with, that one appears a kinde of conſtant Prodigy to another. All theſe have imployed the hours of other men, and beſides are more properly entred among the rarities then the Prodigies of Nature, and ſo fall not within the lines of our preſent Argument.

Secondly, There are *Wonders Extraordinary*, ſuch are they which happen but now and then, and are a kinde of ſhort and tranſient diſcords, ſtepping in ſometimes to recommend the general harmony and evenes in the motions of Nature, and the Government of the world, compriſed under the general name of *Prodigies*.

Now that diviſion of theſe, which I ſhall premiſe to the enſuing diſcourſe, ſhall be ſuch as the neceſſity and deſigne thereof, rather then ſuch as the laws of Logick, do prompt me to; which I conceive may be beſt ſerv'd, by dividing them into Prodigies (barely) *Signal* and *Penal*: For though I have no faith nor favour for the former, yet while I indite them at the bar of Reaſon, I am forc't to take notice of them under ſuch names and titles, as common opinion hath affixt upon them.

Thoſe which are (barely) *Signal* (ſuch, I mean, in vulgar account) are of three ſorts.

1. *Prodigies Natural*, ſuch I reckon all thoſe of whoſe particular and immediate cauſes (though rarely occurring) we are ſufficiently reſolv'd: ſuch as are (to ſpeak with the people) *falling-ſtars, Earthquakes, Extraordinary Eclipſes, the appearance of two or three Suns at once, ſome kinde of monſtrous births*. With theſe I number all events (beſides the common road of Nature) owing to ſome accidental (though to us unknown) aſſiſtance or interruption of

Agents

Agents purely natural, or ſome ſecret and reſerved Law in Nature, as *Comets, New-ſtars, ſome extraordinary alteration in the heavenly bodies*, (as that in the Planet *Venus*, both as to colour and figure before the times of Chriſt, often mentioned by Aſtronomers from *Varro* and S. *Auſtin*) and the ſtrange *deliquium* of light in the Sun about the death of *Cæſar*; *Some unuſual ebbings and flowings of the Sea.* Theſe, I reckon Prodigies Natural, all being but Natures acting of its part in a different habit, and giving us to know how it will exert it ſelf, when ſuch Agents, and ſuch matter chance to meet. S. *Aug. de Civit. Dei.* l. 21. c. 8.

2. *Prodigies præternatural*, ſuch I account all ſtrange Events, which hold of no ſteady cauſes, but are (to us) ſolely caſual and uncertain; as the *firing of a houſe by lightning, the coming to ſhore of ſome ſtrange kinde of fiſh, the breaking off or ſtanding ſtill of Rivers, meſſages delivered by ſpirits, apparitions in the ayr* (which are effects above a natural, and beneath a bare ſupernatural Agent.)

3. *Supernatural*, ſuch as are Events of which Reaſon is ſufficiently reſolved, that they exceed the powers and ſufficiencies of all Natural cauſes. For look as in Religion, there are *quædam juxta Rationem*, ſome things according to the common reaſon of all men, [*viz.* the doctrines of temperance, righteouſneſs, obedience to God;] ſome things *præter rationem*, beſide reaſon, [the diſcoveries of God, which reaſon now apprehends and ſeals unto, but could not *Marte proprio*, of it ſelf reach unto;] ſome things *ſupra rationem* [the great Articles of Faith, tranſcendent to the capacity, as well as light of common reaſon, in the modes and circumſtances of them:] So in the compaſs of Divine Providence, there are three ſorts of works, *quædam juxta Naturam*, ſome according to the common Laws of Natures working; *quædam præter Naturam*, ſome beſide common Nature, ſuch are the Events we call Prodigies, which though according to Nature, as conſidered in ſuch circumſtances and co-incidence of cauſes, yet are beſide it, conſidered in its more uſual and familiar methods of action. *Quædam ſupra Naturam*, ſuch are thoſe alterations in Nature, which exceed the capacities of ſecond cauſes. In a Prodigy (ſtrictly taken) Nature ſuffers from it ſelf, and is (in a ſort) both victour and captive to it ſelf; but in a Miracle, Nature is ſolely paſſive to that original Minde and Power which gave it its firſt Laws of motion.

Theſe ſupernatural Prodigies (though I know not to beleeve any ſuch now happening) yet muſt finde a place in this diſcourſe, not onely becauſe ſome ſuch have (as Embaſſadours extraordinary) been diſpatcht heretofore upon ſome great errand (as the fearfull Eclipſe at our Saviours death, the hailſtones, mentioned *Joſh.* 10. 11. ſo hugely exceeding the common ſtandard of Nature, and perhaps the fiery ſword which hung over *Hieruſalem*, ſo long before its final deſolation) but becauſe our Adverſaries are ſo prone to over-value ſuch occaſions, and to intitle an immediate hand of heaven to all ſuch objects of wonder.

As for thoſe ſtories (with which the Ethnick Legends abound) of the *ſpeaking of children out of their mothers wombs, the raining of ſtones, the ſpeaking of oxen, their being found without hearts or livers when brought*

to the Altars, Fountains running with (real) blood for a long time together (which may seem to enter a fair plea for the honour of being marshalled under this head) I reject them all (with *Tully*,) as fables and impostures, with which the world hath ever been abused (*Rome-Pagan* was as good at inventing stories of Prodigies and Apparitions of the gods, as *Rome-Christian* of Miracles and Apparitions of Saints.) And with a like faith (though better affection, because found in a Poem) I receive many of those *Portenta*, which (as 'tis said) attended the fall of *Cesar*,

De Divin. lib. 2.

——simulubra micantia modis,
Visa sub obscurum noctis, pecudesque locutæ.
Infandum, sistunt amnes, terræque dehiscunt,
Et mœstum illachrymat templis ebur, æraque sudant.
Nec putris manare cruor cessavit.—— Virg. Georg. l. 1.

'Twas but proper for a *Poet* to hang the whole frame of Nature (as it were) with mourning and astonishment, upon the fall of so great a Person as *Cesar* was. Gods miracles carried majesty in those visible characters of Power, Greatness, Wisdom, stampt upon them; (they were never vain and ludicrous) and they came forth upon some errand of importance: like a broad seal they carried Majesty in their aspect, and came to derive credit and authority upon some matter of great weight and moment.

Secondly, There are a sort of *Prodigies Penal* (for I take the word in the latitude of its sence) such as are judgements upon Persons or Nations of a dreadfull and unusual figure and condition: *sudden arrests by death, strange diseases, death by lightning, or the fall of a towre, unusual plagues, defeats of Armies at huge odds and disadvantages, murrain of cattel, very unseasonable years,* &c.

These distinctions premised, I shall offer the best service I can, toward the deciphering of these dark characters of divine Providence; and make enquiry (in the order they now lie before us) into the intent and meaning of these new and unwonted occurrences. In which Essay, I shall assume the liberty (which I readily allow another) of advising freely with Reason, for we cannot (in this Argument) take to any other Oracle to resolve us, if we intend to be wise to sobriety. It is but a just valuation of our selves, to let no vulgar notions commence our perswasions, before they have past the scrutiny of our Reason, and appear to merit our assent.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

Concerning Prodigies, Signal, Natural.

I Shall deſcend now to a cloſe and diſtinct diſcourſe concerning the (forementioned) Prodigies *Signal*; and amongſt them, firſt concerning thoſe which more immediately reſolve into cauſes *Natural*. Concerning all which, I offer this general *Theſis* to proof. *Prodigies Natural are not intended, nor to be expounded the Prognoſticks of judgements, ſuddenly to enſue upon whole Nations or particular perſons.* It is (eſpecially) ignorance of their cauſes and ends which hath preferred ſome of theſe Natural Prodigies to ſo great a veneration and regard in many mens minds. As Ethniciſm of old made the gods it worſhipt, ſo ignorance oft makes the *Furies* it dreads. Iſa. 44. 15.

This *Theſis* I ſhall endeavour to perſwade,

1. By ſome general Reaſons and Arguments.
2. By a particular Induction and Survey of ſuch as ſeem moſt plauſibly pretended the ſilent Monitours of ſome approaching vengeance.

First, By ſome general Reaſons.

SECT. I.

Reaſons to prove Prodigies Natural no Signs of a future judgement.

The firſt Argument taken from their doubtfull and uncertain indication; That proved from the confeſſions of their ableſt Expoſitours; From their different Expoſitions in all times. The Interpreters of them baniſht the Jewiſh Common-wealth of old, upon this account, Philo. Thuanus. *The Argument further urged from* Tully. *God's Signs expreſs; The uſeleſneſs of thoſe which are not.*

2. *From a conſideration of the times wherein moſt attended to. The reaſon why a regard is to be had to the times and ſeaſons; When Laws or Uſages firſt obtained, noted from* K. James. *The times noted eſpecially for groſs ignorance in matters of* Religion *and* Philoſophy. *Some Obſervations upon the remaining Regiſters of ſuch accidents yet extant: The times remarked alſo for the publick fears and diſtractions happening in them.* Livy. Seneca.

3. *From the natural and neceſſary Cauſes of theſe things. More of Nature obſervable in a Prodigy, then common Occurrences.*

4. *From the Nature and temper of the Oeconomy we are now under.*

THe Argument which I ſhall firſt offer to reprehend the common vanity of receiving them as a kinde of indications in bodies Politick, is this: *Their (pretended) indications are ſo hugely perplext, doubt-* *Arg.* 1.

full and uncertain, that it cannot be concluded what judgement they portend, or when to ensue, or whether private persons or whole Nations be alarm'd by them.

If God do write *Fata hominum* in these mystick characters, there is *none on earth found able to reade the writing, and* (with any certainty) *to make known the interpretation thereof.* Most of their Expositours (like those upon *Aristotle*) are rather *Vates quàm Interpretes.* Concerning that prodigious Comet which shone in our Hemisphere, *Ann.* 1618. one that pretended himself as much *Cœlo à Conciliis* as other men, yet thus freely delivers himself, *Deum immortalem! quantò ille plures de sese fermè Opiniones quàm crines sparsit.* To a like purpose *Tycho Brahe* (discoursing *de Nova stella Cygni*, Ann. 1600.) *Decreta Phœnomenon cœlitus illucescentium, ab iis qui artem astrologicam profitentur, præsagiri sat evidenti experimento, nequeunt:* but yet (so hard it is even for wise men to discard their συγγενῆ καὶ συνεφοιτηκότα δόγματα, as *Origen* calls them, Opinions brought with them, and woven into the very first contexture of their minds;) he adds, *Non idcirco statuendum Deum & Naturam talibus noviter formatis corporibus inaniter illudere, nihilque præsagii mundo ostendere*: as if they must needs be in vain, unless they assist presages (which yet no man is able to reach the certain knowledge of.)

A truth which the different purposes and significations to which these Prodigies have been (in all times) expounded, make faith of. In the more ancient times of the world, when they had their *Collegia vatum*, publick Professours of the Arts of Divination, by any unusual *Phœnomena* in Nature, we shall observe *Earthquakes, Comets, Lightnings*, &c. expounded sometimes *læta*, sometimes *sinistra Omina*: All these images (like some among the Papists) were made to look upon the people with a frown or a smile, according as the Priests of old (for State-reasons) were pleased to manage them by their subtle interpretations. Thus, in latter times, they have always (like bells) sounded to such a tune and sence, as the passengers phancy would impose upon them: That *pluvia purpurea*, bloudy rain (in the language of the Naturalists) falling at *Bruxells*, Ann. 1646. concerning the reason of which, there are extant the several judgements of Learned men, was (no doubt) received by timerous and softer phancies, as a presage of a bloudy war suddenly to ensue; whereas others owned it *tanquam Omen pacifici fœderis*, and a Signe that heaven would sooner rain bloud, then there should be any further effusion thereof on Earth or Sea, as the Poet expresseth himself upon that occasion,

Jam satis effusum terrâque marique cruoris,
Ipsæ testantur quæ pluit axis aquæ.

Thus when the heart of *Zuinglius* (who was burnt, being found among the slain) was found intire in the ashes, when his body was consumed, his friends (from this *Ordeel* trial) concluded the stoutness and sincerity, but his adversaries the obdurateness thereof. But the grave Historian makes a more sober glosse upon this providence, then either, in those words, *Adeò turbarit odio aut amore animos, ut fit religionis dissentionibus, pro se quisque omnia superstitiosè interpretatur*;

Mens

Quis non rideret amentiam, insulsitatem, & imperspicientiam veterum, ut unus terræmotus, unum fulmen, unum cœleste signum, rem secundam; alter terræ-motus, alterum fulmen, alterum signum, rem adversam portenderet? Polyd. Virg. *de Prodig.* l. 3.

Thuan. *Obit. doct. vir. Ann.* 1531.

Mens minds disturbed with love or hatred (as it falls out in religious differences) each party superstitiously interprets all accidents in favour of it self.

In the interim we may safely infer the vanity of trusting much to these Prodigies, which (like mercenary souldiers) may be easily brought to fight on either side in any case. Accordingly *Philo* tells us, that the law of *Moses* banisht from the Jewish Nation πάντας ὀιωνοσκόπους, τερασκόπους, all the observers of birds, and regarders of Prodigies, because *these Diviners were led but by spetious and plausible conjectures, entertained different phancies of the same things, both because their subjects had no steady and fixt Nature, and themselves were unprovided of any sure Maximes, by which to measure and prove the conceits of their own minds in reference to them.*

Στοχαζομένους γὰρ πάντες ἦσαν τοῖς φαινομένοις καὶ ἐκ τούτων ἄλλοτε ἄλλας ὑπολαμβάνοντες, διὰ τὸ μήτε τὰ ὑποκείμενα φύσιν ἔχειν πάγιον, μήτε τὴν διανοίας ἀκριβῆ κανόνα παρεῖναι. εἰδὼς ἡ κρίσις διαστήσεται τὰ δόκιμα. l. de Monarc.

Can it now be reasonably imagined, God (*all whose ways are judgement*) ever intended these *portentous* occurrences as his trumpets to alarm a drowsie world, which give forth ἄδηλον φωνὴν, so obscure and uncertain a sound? Can it possibly be presumed, that any thing is there signified where nothing ever was or will be certainly understood? If these be the signs of the gods (said *Tully*, discourring upon this argument) why have they always been so dark and obscure? for if they come forth that we might understand things future, they ought to declare them more openly and plainly; *aut ne occultè quidem, si ea sciri nolebant*, or not so much as darkly, if they would not have them understood. Did God ever in all the Scripture, foretel an evil by any such winding and squint-ey'd Oracles as the Old Serpent made use of, which used to work men to some confused and pannick fears, or to ensnare them, while seeming to warn them? When he spake to Egypt by הִבְרֵי אֹתֹתָיו the words of his signs, *Psa.* 105. 27. they were such as were clearly expressive of his minde and purpose, they were such as (like arrows shot into a Town with letters bound about them) did bear upon them their own signification, and gave very intelligible intimations of their end and intention; whereas all these signes, as commonly reputed, give forth no certain notices of the events they point unto; For they are not Hieroglyphicks of the judgements (as bearing no likeness and resemblance of them) no effective causes of them, nor yet did Scripture (a consideration in stead of all arguments) ever warrant us to receive any of them with those religious and awfull regards which are owing to the Monitors of the Divine displeasure, which certainly it would have done, had the honour of God and the good of men been so hugely concerned in them, as some would have us to imagine.

1 Cor. 14. 8.

Tul. *de Divin.* l. 2. *Quæ est ista (uti creditur) à Diis profecta significatio, & quasi denunciatio calamitatum? quæ volunt Dii Immortales & primùm ea significantes quæ sine interpretibus non possumus intelligere, deinde ea quæ cavere nequeamus?* Id. ib. *In omni consuetudine vel exemplo, tempora spectanda sunt quando primùm res cœpta: in quibus si vel confusio regnaverit vel insciția, derogat illud imprimis authoritati rerum, atque omnia reddit suspecta.* Cited by L. *Bacon. Aug. Scient.* l. 2. *præfat.*

Secondly, *The times wherein these Prodigies have been received with their first and most religious regards, were such as sufficiently lessen their repute with all persons that use not to trust their faith without some security.* Excellent that speech of K. *James*, A good *Crisis* of a President or custom

stom

ſtom may be made by an attendance to the condition of the times wherein they firſt obtained, which if remarkable, either for the ignorance or confuſions of them, they greatly render the things to ſuſpicion and challenge, which received their firſt birth and original in them. Now then if (as the Aſtrologers uſe) we calculate the Nativity of this Opinion of Prodigies, we ſhall finde nothing promiſed and ſignified to oblige our affections, becauſe (as truth obtains moſt in times of great knowledge and peace, when we have moſt ability and leiſure to judge, ſo) the times wherein this firſt and principally prevailed, ſtand blemiſht with theſe two great evils, *Ignorance* and *Diſtraction*.

Firſt, *They were times of greateſt ignorance* both in matters of *Religion* and *Learning*.

1. *In matters of Religion*, who more critically obſervant of all ſuch unuſual accidents, then the *Heathen who knew not God?* whoſe whole Religion (in the practice of it) was but a Syſtem of ridiculous, obſcene, and inhumane rites; and (in the ſpeculation thereof) but an endleſs obſervation of Omens, and prodigies, and a pretended skill of interpreting dreams and ſtrange accidents. It was among the Egyptians (as we learn from *Strabo*) a great inſtance of Religion, ἀναφέρειν εἰς τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα to enter into their ſacred records all the *Errata Naturæ*; and (perhaps in an imitation of them) the Romans kept their annual Regiſters of the ſeveral anomalous occurrences in the world; ſome fragments of which have reacht our own times; upon a deliberate peruſal whereof, four things (not unſerviceable to our general Diſcourſe) offer themſelves to our obſervation.

Jul. Obſequ. de Oſtent.

1. That the Events ſucceeding them were as often happy, as unfortunate: the truth whereof the curious Reader may ſoon reſolve himſelf of by a ſhort ſurvey.

2. That they generally concluded in ſuperſtition; the people being readily wrought on to inſtitute *novas Ferias*, to conſecrate new Temples to the gods, to inſtitute new Rites, *expiare prodigia, & procurare monſtra* (as their phraſe was) to divert the unlucky Omen.

Vide Liv. *Hiſt. l.* 22. 1. *&* 32. 1.

3. That there hardly paſſeth a year or two in that Regiſter, wherein there are not recorded ſeveral of theſe *Portenta*.

4. That a vain opinion of theſe things held the people under a perpetual pedagogy to baſe and ignoble fears of God, and impendent evils.

Upon which accounts, I do more then incline to beleeve, that the devil (who hath the *poſſe aeris* at his command) did often (by divine permiſſion) procure many ſtrange impreſſions on Nature, thereby to fright thoſe to his altars, which he could never perſwade; and to ſubdue the minds of men to (his own image) a perpetual fear and trembling before the ſence of a Deity. But God (who uſeth to make the devils mines to fall in upon himſelf) made (no doubt) this happy uſe of theſe ſlaviſh fears in the minds of the Gentiles, even the uſhering in of the Goſpel Jubilee with the greater acceptance among them; as by the fears & terrours of the Law, he alſo levelled the way to its more ready and cheerful reception among the Jews. But to return,

Secondly,

Secondly, As ignorant were the times in *Philoſophy*, as Religion; perfect ſtrangers to the Reaſons of things: for (as it is well obſerved) as the knowledge of the natural cauſes of Earthquakes, Eclipſes, Lightnings, Meteors, &c. obtained amongſt the Gentiles of old, ſo all their ominous fears, their *libri fulgurales*, interpretations of prodigies, fell into contempt and diſrepute: the more men advanc't into the light, the leſs apt were they to ſtart. They then began to ſmile at their former ſuperſtitions, as men in the day laugh at thoſe dreams and viſions which frighted them in the night.

Beſides (ſecondly) they were *Times of publick fears, troubles, confuſions* (generally) *when men were moſt impreſſive to a fear of theſe prodigious accidents.* Thus *Livy* ſomewhere notes, *turbido aliquo tempore, verſis in Religionem animis, multa viſa creditaque prodigia quæ non erant*; and elſewhere tells us, (*Hiſt. l.* 28. 11.) *In civitate, tanto diſcrimine belli ſollicita, quum Omnium ſecundorum adverſorumque cauſas in Deos verterent, multa prodigia nunciabantur.*

Attamen hæc in bello plura & majora videntur, eadem enim non animadvertuntur in pace: accedit illud etiam, quod in metu & periculo cùm creduntur facilè, tum finguntur impunius. Cicer. ſpeaking *de Oſtent. & Prodig. l.* 2. *de Divin.* *Nuſquam plura exempla vaticinantium invenies, quàm ubi formido mentes religione mixta percuſſit.* Sen. Quæſt. Nat. l. 6. c. 29. 2 King. 3. 22, 23.

Men, when they think God diſpleaſed, (as they deal by a man they conceive their adverſary) look upon all his actions through the black *medium* of ſuſpicion and jealouſie, and therefore they all ſeem to carry terrours and affrightments with them. All ſtrange Accidents (like ſtrange paſſengers) in times of diſcompoſure are ſuſpected and examined, which freely paſs without our notices when peace and love ſpread their gentle wings over a nation; when fear hath once tinctured the eye of the minde with black (dreadfull) apprehenſions, it eaſily ſees every thing of its own colour: it either finds its object, or creates it in every occurrence; the ſun ſhines not upon the water or a cloud, but (like the *Moabites*) men conclude ſigns of bloud from the redneſs of the colour, when fear hath once ſoftned the ſpirits, and diſabled the minde for a cool and ſedate judgement and valuation of things. Beſides, in ſuch times, Religion knows not to keep its mean, but quickly runs over into ſuperſtition (a ſervile flattery of God, and an obſervance of him in little, weak, feminine inſtances of devotion.)

Now the Religion of Prodigies being conceived thus in the womb of groſs ignorance, and nouriſht by the ſoft and eaſie fears of men in affliction, when their fancy (like mettal in the fire) refuſeth no figure, we cannot entertain any great Opinion of its ſtrength and goodneſs without a forfeiture of our credit, with more conſiderate and ſerious perſons. Can it be ever thought that God ſhould advance an obſervation of theſe things into ſo neceſſary a part of our Religion, adopt it a great inſtance of our regards of his ſuperintendence, and preſidency over the affairs of the world, when (we ſee) the devil made choice of it to entertain the devouter fears of his Votaries withall? Did God ever take ſacrifice from the devils altars? The devil (indeed) hath alway been Gods ape, but God will alway be found the devils oppoſite, and to tread counter to him perpetually. Many of the critical rites and uſages appointed the Jewiſh Nation, will be found to reſolve into the divine purpoſe to croſs and thwart (by his commands) the rites of the *Zabii*, the *Egyptians*, and other neighbouring

bouring Nations, which had the devil for the Great Master of their (religious) Ceremonies. When our Saviour came into the world the Religion of the greatest part of it (through the agency of the devil) ran out into a multitude of little rites, weak observances, bodily postures; and he appoints a Religion (directly opposite) plain, simple, rational, life and spirit, whose main designe was to employ and perfect the minde and spirit of a man. And can it be thought that heaven and hell now touch each other so far, that we must borrow the measures of our biggest fears and hopes, and motives to Repentance, from the Ethnick Divinity? (in which if there had been *aliquid sani*, to be sure the devil would have hindred its gaining so great a regard as it did among his Votaries) must we now look for such a Jewel as the intimations of the counsels of infinite Wisdom are, in the dunghill of obscene and monstrous births, apparitions of lying spirits, strange voices in the air, mighty winds, alterations in the face of heaven, &c. from which the Gentiles in the *times of their ignorance* (to be-nighted men rotten wood shines) thought to receive the light of some heavenly counsel and direction.

Arg. 3. Ignorat Naturæ potentiam, quæ illi non putat aliquando licere, nisi quod sæpius facit. Sen.

Thirdly, *Prodigies Natural*, are not to be regarded as Prognosticks of Events arbitrary, *even because they are Natural*, [are owing to as necessary causes in Nature as the more common and easie productions thereof] no need to call in the extraordinary assistances of heaven to solve these unusual *Phænomena*, for as Nature is but a constant and durable Prodigy, so a Prodigy but a more rare and unusual Nature (as hath been shewn by many Writers, to which I remit the capable Reader.)

Nay (upon a due judgement of things) there will perhaps appear more of *Nature* in a Prodigy, then in the more harmonious consort of Uniform Agents, to which common usage hath appropriated that name; That Nature in its production of the several kinds of creatures, should (as if they were all stampt with one common seal) give them forth in such equal and similar figures and proportions, is a more just object of wonder, then to see the natural *Archeus* sometimes to play the bungler, and to leave its work (in some parts thereof) rude and misshapen. That the Earth should generally be delivered of the many vapours and winds within its bowels, without the pangs and throws of an earthquake; and that all the *host of Heaven should march every one on his way, and not break their ranks, neither thrust one another, but walk every one on his path* (to borrow the language of the Prophet) are prodigies beyond an Earthquake. New star, or monster sometime discovered to the world, and therefore more justly chosen to be the constant instances of the divine Wisdom and Power; and to see some strange fires breaking forth (sometimes) from the caverns of the earth, is so much beneath wonder, that *Pliny* tells us, it exceeds all wonder, that there should be any day wherein all the things in the world (so pregnant with fiery principles) do not break forth into one mighty flame, and lay the world in ashes.

Joel 2. 7, 8.

Excedit profectò omnia miracula, ullum diem fuisse in quo non cuncta conflagrarent. Plin. Hist. Nat. l. 2. c. 107.

Now then, what sober Reason can warrant us to conclude any necessary and natural occurrences the prophetick signs of Events (to us)

us) purely arbitrary and contingent? Either all such irregular accidents shall be allow'd presages of future judgements, and then every Nation will become a *Magor Missabib*, and (what was threat upon the Jews) *our lives shall alway hang in doubt before us, we shall then fear night and day, and have no assurance*, (at least, no comfort) *of our lives*: or else some onely of these Prodigious Events shall be so acknowledg'd; but then, at whose feet must we sit to learn which are onely the Interpreters of the power of Nature, and which are Διὸς ἄγγελοι, Gods messengers to proclaim to a Nation that the *days of its visitation* are approaching? Certainly signs of judgments extraordinary, must themselves be such, they must (as the Prophet speaks in another case) *be their own witnesses*, and (like Heralds which proclaim a war) bear upon them (if possible) that badge and cognizance whereby their office may be known, all may understand to what end and purpose they come forth from God. We find in Scripture, that Gods real signs were generally great and mighty, transcendent to the powers and possibilites of Natural Agents, that it might appear his power was greatly concern'd in them, and that they came forth upon a greater purpose then the bare service of the laws of Nature, and the powers of some second Causes. Jer. 20. 3. Deut. 28. 66. Isai 44. 9. Arg. 4. Exod. 7. 3, 4.

Fourthly, *The condition and temper of the Oeconomy we are now under admits not our expectation of any signs from heaven, either to witness against the practices or opinions of any party of men, or to give notice of an approaching mercy or judgement* [to all which purposes they ministred heretofore.] 1 King. 18. 24. 2 King. 20. 9. Luke 21. 25.

God was pleas'd heretofore (suitably to the non-age of the Church) to address himself very much to the lower faculties of the Soul, (Phancy and imagination;) accordingly we finde Prophecies deliver'd in vehement and unusual schemes of speech, such as are apt greatly to strike and affect upon imagination; Christ was promis'd (as one speaks) *sub magnificis & admirationem facientibus ideis*, the mysteries of the Gospel were held forth in most splendid types and symbols, and the law of God forc't upon the spirits of men heretofore by the terrours of a thundering heaven and a *burning mountain*, and a speedy Vengeance upon the despisers thereof, the spirits of good men carried out to actions and tempers beyond their natural capacities, by the pregnant and vigorous impresses of the divine Spirit, and the fears of the Church excited, and her faith assisted by *mighty signs* and wonders, (the withdrawing whereof the Church bewayls, they all vanishing as the light of divine Revelation, prevail'd, as stars doe upon the approaches of day-light.) Heb. 12. 8. Psal. 74. 9.

But they which talk of and look for any such vehement expressions of Divinity now, mistake the temper & condition of that Oeconomy which the appearance of our Saviour hath now put us under; wherein all things are to be managed in a more sedate, cool, and silent manner, in a way suited to, and expressive of the temper our Saviour discover'd in the world, *Who caused not his voice to be heard in the streets*; and to the condition of a Reasonable Being made to be manag'd by steady and calm arguments, and *the words of Wisdom heard in quiet* Isa. 42. 2. Eccles. 9. 17.

heard in quiet [in a ſmooth and ſerene temper;] the myſteries of the Goſpel come forth cloth'd in ſedate and intelligible forms of ſpeech; the minds of men are not now drawn into ecſtaſie by any ſuch vehement and great examples of Divine Power and Juſtice as attended the lower and more ſervile ſtate of the World. The miracles our Saviour wrought were of a calm and gentle nature [curing the blinde, reſtoring the ſicke and lame, not cauſing of thunder and ſtorms, as *Samuel*, but appeaſing them] none of them ſuch as the Jews call'd for, σημεῖα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ſigns from heaven, ſuch prodigious and affrighting thunders and fires which attended the delivery of the law and the ſpirit of *Elijah*. Indeed the *Veil of the Temple was rent*, the Sun dreadfully eclypſt, the Earth terribly ſhaken at his death; but theſe aſtoniſhing wonders were made uſe of as his laſt reſerve to conquer the prejudices of an obdurate people, upon whom his more gentle and obliging inſtances of Divine Majeſty made no impreſſion: and perhaps theſe prodigious changes in Nature were intended as prophetick emblems of the great change ſhortly to enſue *in heaven* [the way of worſhip and religion] and *Earth* [the powers and Kingdoms of the World] by the power and Doctrine of that Perſon who then died upon the Croſs.

Mat. 16. 1.

Heb. 12. 26, 27.

That *mighty ruſhing Wind* at Pentecoſt which was iſſu'd in a ſoft and lambent fire upon the heads of the firſt Preachers of the Goſpel, was poſſibly a figure of that more vehement and terrible State of the law, which uſher'd the way for and determin'd in the more ſedate and gentle diſpenſation of the Goſpel. God hath now (in a great meaſure) left frighting of men to heaven by viſible terrours: the law of the *Meſſias* was deliver'd upon the mount in the ſmall and ſtill voice, and is ſet home upon the hearts of men by the terrour onely of a πλειονότερον κρίμα, a more heavy vengeance in another World, then what overtook the deſpiſers of Moſes law: God expects now that we ſhould be judiciouſly religious, and acted to his ſervice by a *Spirit of love and of a ſound minde*, to fear his threatnings more then the burnings of *Sinai*, to look upon a bad man (ſince the appearance of Chriſt to take away ſin) as the greateſt Prodigy, and to expect the ſigns of an approaching judgment *non in Erratis Naturæ, ſed ſæculi*.

Mat. 23. 14.

Thus have I endeavour'd the proof of the *Theſis* propos'd, by ſome general Reaſons and Arguments: Others there are of as great moment, which (that I overlay not the Readers patience) ſhall be reſerv'd as ſo many nerves and ſinews to run through, and hold together the main body of the enſuing Diſcourſe.

SECT.

SECT. II.

Some Particular Prodigies prov'd no ſigns of enſuing Evils.

Comets commonly thought preſages of evils, and why. A difference between comets and ſome luminous bodies in the Heavens like them, *Prov'd not to be* ſigna operantia *of any evils in Earth. The difficulty of determining the ſpecifick Nature of a* Comet, *prov'd no incenſt exhalation by 4 Conſiderations: further evinc't* no effective cauſe *of evil, from the dimenſion and the acknowledg'd altitude thereof. Three Arguments to prove them not to be* Signa indicantia *of any evils. The difficulty of reprehending any errour which bottomes in phancy and imagination. The Omiſſion of a particular diſcourſe concerning ſome other Prodigies, excus'd.*

THat which the law of our intended method lays next before us, is the proof of the *Theſis* propos'd by a particular Induction. I ſhall therefore direct my thoughts upon ſome, (twere to overvalue the Argument to ſpeak to many) Prodigies, which have been thought the moſt plauſible pretenders to the honour of being *Symbola Prophetica*: Amongſt which Comets are of more eſpecial regard, and have been receiv'd (by the faith or fears of moſt times) as a kind of Beacon fir'd from Heaven to alarm the World, and to give intimation of an approaching evil: The *Cauda Cometæ* eſpecially ſeems to the eye of ignorance the emblem of a Flaming ſword, or fiery rod, and to carry the dreadfull images of ſome mighty ſcourge prepar'd to correct a froward world withall. With the Poet it paſſeth as a rul'd caſe,

——*Nunquam cœlo ſpectatum impunè Cometam.*

A comet never ſhone from Heaven to give the world any pannick fears. The *Aſtrologers* (as confident of the final as the Peripateticks of the formal cauſe, of any ſuch unuſual lights) take themſelves upon the appearance of them to be the *Filii cœnaculi* which are to expound to the world theſe myſtick characters of Heaven. Indeed any alteration and unwonted wrinckle in the face of heaven, is thought (like a frown) a preſage of anger and ſome intended evil, partly becauſe Heaven is conceiv'd the throne of juſtice whence 'tis moſt proper to expect the ſigns of Vengeance, but eſpecially becauſe the general harmony of its motions and conſtancy of its parts (whereby it reproacheth the Lunacies and irregularities of this lower world) ſeem to aſſure that Anomalies at any time therein cannot iſſue *ex natura ſubjecti, ſed Conſilio Dei*, from the nature of the ſubject, but the wiſe purpoſe of God (by theſe) to warn before he ſtrike, and (as by a *flaming ſword*) to drive the world out of its fools paradiſe, (a flattering peace and ſecurity.)

To encounter the vanity of ſo ſpecious and obſtinate an imagination, I ſhall endeavour to evince theſe ſtrange Phænomena in Hea-

ven, no Prognosticks of any ensuing evils, as being neither the *signa operantia*, nor yet the *signa indicantia* of them. Only I must (before I proceed) tell the Reader that by Comets, I mean Comets (truly so called) not those (*Cometo-idæ*, as a more accurate regard to Nature hath of late taught men to distinguish) fiery and luminous appearances in the elementary region which onely ape and resemble them; but such luminous bodies which are carri'd with a kinde of regular and uniform motion, and extend their continuance oft to the space of many weeks or months: and so seem a kinde of *Participia Naturæ*, partaking of the light and motion of a Planet, and of the vanishing Nature of a Meteor. Now to our business.

First, *Comets are not to be own'd the* signa Operantia, *the effective signs of any evils ensuing*: for thus 'tis vulgarly concluded, upon this presumption, that they are a kinde of hot and sulphureous exhalations, set on fire, which (as 'twere the feaver of Nature) prey upon the *humidum*, the moysture of it, and so suddenly dry and exhaust it: whence ensue great droughts, dearths, famines, pestilences: and by intending the heat of the air they are thought to encline to feavers, to promote choler in Princes and Nations, and so to lay that fuel in men, which will soon break forth into the flames of publick wars and confusions.

Miraculum Naturæ Cometa, idoneum ingeniis nostris torquendis, quod admirari debemus, cognoscere nunquam Poterimus. Fien. de Comet. p. 18.

The Reasons I shall tender to perswade the contrary shall not be many because I designe not a triumph but a victory, and would not that this part should swell beyond the just measures and proportions: I shall content my self with some few taken from this threefold Topick. The *Nature*, the *Dimensions*, the *Altitude* of a Comet.

Res perplexissima est & omnem ferè conatum eludit. From. de Com. l. 3. c. 2. A. 7

1. I argue it to be no *Operative signe of evil in this* lower World, from the *General Nature thereof*. As for its more specifick and distinct Nature, it is that which many Philosophers have shot their bolt at, but it is hard to say (at this distance) who hath hit the mark. Enquiries about heavenly bodies usually conclude in wonder and doubt: Accordingly (in this argument) we shall finde all sorts of Philosophers (ancient and modern) profess themselves unresolv'd, and modest, but onely the avow'd Followers of *Aristotle*, whose usage is (too often) in *Divinity* to make a great deal of nothing; and *in Philosophy*, nothing of a great deal. We fell from God by reaching after the knowledge of things too high for us, and 'tis a mercifull justice that we should be humbled into a sense of our sin and ignorance by our being pos'd in those things which we most converse with, or are most desirous to understand. However those notices we can arrive to of the *General Nature* of a Comet, will sufficiently serve the reprehension of that vulgar conceit now before our consideration [that 'tis *Mali Præco*] For it appears to us in an evidence as great as the matter will bear, 1. *That a Comet is no exhalation set on fire*; (the great hinge which the Opinion turns upon) 2. *That it is a kind of heavenly body*.

Nobis rimari illa & conjectura ire in occulta, tantum licet, nec cum fiducia inveniendi, nec sine spe. Sen. de. *Comet. loq.* Nat. Q. l. 7. c. 29.

First, *It is no exhalation incensi*. This may appear first from the *constant equality and evenness of its light and figure*; the main body of a Comet is observ'd to maintain an even and constant rotundity, and

to

to ſend forth a direct and uniform ray of light in the tayl or train thereof: whereas if it were a fire, it would ſhift its figures according as the neceſſity of that *Pabulum* whereby it is maintain'd, did require; and would appear greater or leſs according as it had more or leſs ſubdu'd and prevail'd upon the matter which it ſpent its force upon. Beſides Comets as they are (like the Planets) in their motion, a kind of *ſtellæ erraticæ*, ſo alſo like them in the Nature and quality of their light; they do not *ſcintillare*, and provoke the eye to more intenſe notices by any new and uneven vibrations of light, whereas fire ſparkles, and is alway in (either direct or circular) motions.

2. *From the clear and conſtant viſibility of them.* Nothing checkes and intercepts our full and free view of an appearing Comet, but (what may alſo obſcure the ſun) the interpoſe of a cloud. Whereas were they incenſt exhalations (of ſuch vaſt dimenſions) a Comet muſt neceſſarily carry its own Earth about with it to eclipſe it ſometimes from our ſight, becauſe it is ſuppos'd (like a torch) in the purſuit of its *pabulum* to burn downward, (though it be apparent that Comets extinguiſh and become inviſible by moving higher into the Heavens) becauſe the more groſs and uninflamed parts muſt ſometimes needs intertupt our ſight of that fire which hath ceas'd the parts which lye next the ſun, or the (ſuppos'd) elementary fire, which the vulgar doctrine aſſerts the occaſion of theſe prodigious fires in heaven.

3. *From the Uniformity and ſteadineſs of their motions.* Comets though not all ſubject to one and the ſame law of motion (becauſe obſerv'd indifferent in their motions to any quarter of Heaven) yet are all noted to proceed with a very great conſtancy and uniformity, to deſcribe exactly a ſegment of a great circle, and not to be acted to any ſuch giddy and caſual courſes, as fire, which is (in the elementary Region) determin'd by the air, or the circumſtances of the matter which feeds, it which way it ſhall move and incline it ſelf. *Nullis ignibus ordinariis & cæleſtibus iter flexum eſt, ſideris proprium eſt ducere orbem.* Sen. Nat. queſt. l. 7. de Comet. c. 23.

4. And laſtly, *From the dimenſions of a Comet.* Tycho meaſur'd in the tayl or train of his Comet, An 1577. ninety ſix ſemidiamiters of the earth; and ſome aſtronomers found in the beard of that which ſhone An. 1618. the extent of 382700. German miles; (in ſhort) if we truſt the meaſures of Aſtronomy, they have been oft found to exceed the proportions of the Earth: Now it ſeems greatly improbable that ſo vaſt a body of vapours ſhould be drawn together ſo long and ſo high, nay impoſſible; the whole earth (if but one vaſt exhalation) being inſufficient for its make and ſupply. Its here return'd, that it were indeed impoſſible, if the body of a Comet were ſolely of a ſpherical figure; but a Comet (ſay our adverſaries) may be expanded to a plain, like a cloud, and ſo maintain the opinion of its dimenſions: To which we anſwer, that although in ſome poſition, a plain figure may give the ſhew and appearance of a Comet, yet it cannot in every motion and ſite and every poſition of Beholders, unleſs it be of a ſpherical figure. Vid. From Met. l. 3. c. 4. A. 7.

I proceed next to a more poſitive deſcription of the Nature of a

Comet, by proving it to be *some heavenly body*. What kinde *of heavenly body it is*, is as difficult as unneceſſary in this place largely to define. That ſuch a one it is, was a truth credited by the joynt ſuffrages of the more Ancient Philoſophers. *Ariſtotle* ſeems the firſt, who preſum'd againſt the ſenſe of Antiquity to degrade Comets from heaven to the degree and place of meteors, ſet on fire by his *ignis elementaris*. He had one Philoſophy *pro Muſais* and another *pro Scholis*, which latter, (becauſe recommended to the Populacy) his chief care was to make (like reeds and canes) generally ſmooth and facile in the ſurface (onely interpoſing here and there a few knots to exerciſe the ſubtiler ſort of his auditors) not much caring though it were hollow, and fill'd out with little beſides aery words and eaſy ſpeculations, beyond which the moſt never take care to ſearch and enquire.

Cometas cœleſtes eſſe à Mathematicis, præſertim Tychone & Keplero, nuper ſic probatum ut pudeat non credere. Id. c. 2. Art. 1.

Largely to endeavour the proof of this truth, would be to undervalue the pains of more able Undertakers in this argument, and to over-doe the end to which this diſcourſe is levell'd. In ſhort, (to omit the conſideration of its riſe and ſetting) the *Parallax*, of a Comet is found much leſs then that of the moon; which gives the moſt undoubted report of its exceeding it in *Altitude*. Beſides if it were not much above our *Atmoſphear* (which exceeds not the diſtance of fourſcore miles) its *arcus apparentiæ* would be ſo ſtrait and inconſiderable that (as hath been prov'd) it would in two or three hours quite run out of the compaſs of our ſenſible Horizon, nor poſſibly continue ſo long together viſible to us as Comets are generally known to doe.

Our ſecond Argument to evince that no evil in this lower world, owes it ſelf to the malign aſpects of a Comet, is taken *from the dimenſions thereof*. It ſeems (in the body of it) ſcarce equal to the dimenſions of a ſtar of the firſt magnitude: the truth is, *pars minima eſt ipſe Cometa ſui*, the true and real Comet is the leaſt part of its appearing ſelf, in regard the tayle thereof is not οὐσιῶδες, ſed ἔμφασις, not any real and ſubſtantial part thereof (as commonly preſum'd) flaming forth as the condition of the matter doth invite the fire to follow, but the ſhining of the ſolar beams through the more porous and ſpungy parts of the head thereof (ſome imitation whereof, we ſometimes have in the beams of the ſetting ſun darted through a diſpos'd cloud, or through ſome ſmall crevice in a wall, which (after the figure of a rod) firſt cloſe and knit together, and then ſpread and dilate themſelves according as they advance further from the *anguſtiæ* of the matter whereat they enter (for its obſerv'd that ſtill as the Sun circles in its diurnal motion in the heavens, ſo doth a Comets tayle veere, and reſpect an oppoſite poynt in the heavens) ſo that theſe mighty vibrations of light from its luminous body, put a great fallacy upon the eye, and report it much larger then in truth it is. Now then can it be preſum'd by any man that will ow any account of his Opinions to Reaſon, that (in it ſelf) *ſo ſmall a body, at ſo vaſt a diſtance, laſting ſo inconſiderable a time and moving ſo faſt away*, can be ſufficient for any ſuch notable effects as ſome eaſy men intitle

title it unto? What History (almoſt) is there of Comets but what arrives at us ſtain'd and defil'd by the ſuperſtition of the writers, able to ſupport the confidence of this perſwaſion? How little able are we, after the obſervation of ſo many hundred years to aſſigne the effects of the moſt noted ſtars in heaven, except the Sun and Moon?

3. Our laſt Argument was [illegible] the *acknowledg'd altitude of theſe unwonted appearences.* The [illegible] marſhal them in the loweſt place, aſſign them very near the or[illegible]re: Now how weak & feeble an impreſſion can a few exhalations kindled at ſo vaſt a diſtance make upon this lower world? eſpecially conſidering there is the middle region interpos'd, by its coldneſs fitted to temper and qualify the heated and exciccate ayr, before it mingle with that which we here breath in. Beſides how little able are thoſe weaker impreſſions upon the ayr, to ſtand before thoſe more ſenſible and vigorous alterations which the ſucceeding ſeaſons of the year continually make upon it? The Opinion which aſſerts Comets to be incens'd exhalations would carry (in my eye) more fair appearances of truth, if owing them rather the preſages of ſeaſons healthfull, and deſireable, in regard it ſuppoſeth ſo many noxious and impure exhalations conſum'd (at ſo vaſt a diſtance from Earth) by fire, the moſt potent corrective of an infectious ayr.

Theſe Reaſons ſeem ſufficient to reach the proof of our firſt aſſertion [that Comets are not *ſigna operativa malorum*] I am next to prove them not to be *ſigna indicantia of them* which I ſhall endeavour *From the indifferency and Univerſality of their aſpects and mations.* They often paſs over the heads of many and different Countries, that in 1618. was ſucceſſively vertical to *Arabia, Perſia, Turky, Barbary, Morocco, China, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Muſcovie, &c.* now which of theſe can it be preſum'd to level its malign-aſpects at? Which of theſe was moſt concern'd in its preſages? ſurely none of them. But as *the Sun and Moon* being deſign'd to *declare the glory of God* to the world, *their line* therefore *is gone forth through all the Earth*, ſo (poſſibly) God intending theſe wonderfull appearances in heaven, not ſo much the monitours of his anger, as of his glory, would have them thus Catholick in their motions, and ſhew themſelves to ſuch variety of people and languages. Pſal. 19. 4.

(2) I argue againſt them *from the aiery weakneſs of that foundation, the art of preſaging by them is bottom'd upon*; which we may take in the words of a *Great maſter* in all curious arts. *Portendunt Cometæ juxta Saturnum peſtes & proditiones, & ſterilitatem; Circa Jovem, legum mutationem, mortem Pontificum; juxta Martem, bella; juxta Solem, toti orbi magnam cladem; juxta Lunam magnas inundationes, aliquando ſiccitates,* &c. *juxta Caronam & in Tropicis Æquinoctiiſque, Regum interitum,* &c. the cracks and flaws of which diſcourſe appear ſo wide and viſible, that 'tis needleſs to ſtrike it with any Reaſon, to make a more full diſcovery of them. The *Aſtrologers* (like children) ſet up in their ſoft imagination, ſome phantaſtical images of things, and then fear them as if they were great realities. Very ſollicitous they have ever appear'd, *to lengthen their cords*, (to draw all kind of Cardan. l. 14. De rer. var. c. 70.

Persons and Events, within the lines and limits of their art) but very careless to *strengthen their stake* (to borrow the expression of of the Prophet) to ratifie and make good the Principles upon which they do proceed. All the images they speak of in Heaven, and the significations apply'd to them, [illegible] their credit solely to the courtesie of imagination.

Isa. 54. 2.

3. *From the contradiction of* [illegible]*ce.* How many sore evils hath the world travailed under, [illegible] were never signified by any foregoing Comet? (sometimes not happening for many years together) and how many Comets have there happened (sometimes) in a short compass, not seconded by any notable alterations in the places, to which they seem'd especially to have respect? Commendable herein is the diligence of *Gemma Frisius* in taking notice of as many good as bad events consequent to the appearance of them. Particularly so happy was that Comet which happened under *Nero*, that *Seneca* tells us, *Cometis detraxit infamiam*, it cleared the credit of Comets, and brought them into good thoughts. They seem indeed the presages of approaching evils, either because their *Interpreters* are so well advis'd as to assign them a competent period of time to produce their effects in, and to take in whole kingdoms as the scene to act their Tragedies upon, and commonly put into their Almanack, onely *dies nefastos*, days markt with some black and sad accidents (which we naturally retain a very quick sense and remembrance of) after the appearance of them; or else the world would appear to treat its inhabitants with as much courtesie after, as before the appearance of a Comet.

Multi sunt à nobis visi Cometæ, quos nulla uspiam totâ in Europâ subsecuta est pernicies mortalium, & multi clarissimi viri suo fato functi sunt, multi eversi principatus, pessundatæ familiæ illustrissimæ, sine ullo Cometæ præsagio. Scal. exerc. 79. §. 11. *Natur. Quæ.* l. 7. c. 17.

The Opinion I now contest, is so receptive of Argument against it, that there is the less need of any to press it further, especially considering the great Advocates thereof are so much under the command of a mighty imagination, which delights in *conjugates* and *parallels*, and *symbolizing instances*, so much that it usually makes them or findes them in Nature. Now we shall ever finde, that all persons which take up opinions from their own Poetical Genius and busie phansie, are impregnable to all the assaults of reason: the *Rosy-Crucians* acted so hugely by imagination in *Philosophy*, some kinde of *Chimists* in *Medicks*, the *Cabalists* in Scripture-expositions, *Enthusiasts* in Religion, *Figure-casters* in Astrology, are so invincibly resolved upon their hypotheses, that (like him in the story) when their hands, those little reasonings wherewith they hold them, are cut off, they will *mordicus defendere*, hold them with their teeth, biting and reviling language, thrown upon their opposers and neglecters. They are entertained with pleasant and easie dreams, and therefore are angry with those which attempt to awaken and discompose them. As for our selves, let us be content rather to sit down in the darkness of an humble ignorance, then to follow an *ignis fatuus*, the pretending light of Divination by a Comet, which leads but to the bog and precipice of a superstitious fear and an abused minde: God hath sealed up the Natures and ends of some things in the world in a σῖον σκότος, *to hide pride from man*: He will have some mysteries in every science past

Pusilla res mundus est, nisi in illo, quod quærat omnis mundus, habeat. Sen.

our

our search, to assure us, that there is one *First Minde*, from whom these depths came forth, and who can fathom and comprehend them all. I have nothing further to superadd in this Argument but this: There are some unusual appearances in this Elementary Region, the last endeavours of fire to imitate and copy out the glories of the celestial Region, upon which the common suffrage of Philosophers hath bestowed the title of Comets, because they seem to touch one another in some similar properties of light, bigness, continuance, upon which I shall bestow a few words upon a more proper occasion.

This part of the main body of my Argument, concerning Comets, exceeding thus its just measures and proportions, must necessarily starve and shrink those which (in my first thoughts) grew next unto it [concerning *Earthquakes*, the *apparition of two or three Suns at once*, and *monstrous productions*] for, to redeem my former prolixity, I shall choose to speak to them *sparsim*, as the necessary returns of the argument shall give occasion: Adding in this onely concerning births, which go off from the common figures of their kinds, that as the assistance of *God the Spirit*, with our holy endeavours, doth not take away the ἁμαρτήματα πρέξεως, the weaknesses attendant on Christian practice, because he acts us *ad modum nostrum*; so neither doth the co-assistance of *God the Father* with all Natural Agents, quite remove the ἁμαρτήματα φύσεως, the errours of Nature, all things being assisted according to their proper measures, powers and capacities, and with due regard to the Laws of action appointed to some other intervening second causes, which perhaps we have no knowledge of, or attend not much unto.

SECT. III.

An Answer to the Objections against the precedent Discourse.

The first Objection taken from the common sence and perswasion of men proposed. Some general answers returned unto it. An enquiry made into the reasons of it, and resolved. 1. Into an ignorance of causes. Ignorance noted to beget confidence in the head, and diffidence in the heart. 2. Into guilt, quickly awakened into a fear of an approaching evil, and why. 3. The application of a humane measure to the divine actings. The commonness and evil of this usage noted in Philosophy and Divinity. 4. A great propension in men to close with any flattering medium *to arrive at the knowledge of things future. This noted in all Nations, some account given thereof. 5 The Agency of the devil. The advantages this perswasion gives him. His designe to work base and servile fears in men, noted. 6 The authority of a traditional superstition. Prodigies observed in our times, observed in former. 7 The private opinions of some contemplative persons, inclining to this perswasion. Some of them touched upon. 8 The Nature of the soul, greatly impressive to a conceit of* parallels, *equalities and similitudes in the Government of the world. Strange judgements and changes*

ges in earth, described by Poets and Prophets usually by some mighty changes in Nature. 9 The Natural aptness of the soul to entertain things vehement and extraordinary, with great Opinions. Arguments from general consent, when considerable.

BEfore we can have peaceable possession of the truth, for which so much evidence of Reason hath been given in, it will be necessary to remove those Objections with which our title thereunto is a little incumbred. Now these are taken from a five-fold *Topick*.

1. *From the common sense and perswasion of men.*
2. *The authority and Testimony of Learned Writers.*
3. *The attestation of common Experience.*
4. *The seeming evidence of Reason.*
5. *The Testimony of Sacred Writ.*

The four former have weight enough to incline the scale the other way, the latter seems to weigh it quite down.

Object. 1. First, *We are urged with the common sense and perswasion of the world in all ages.* He that hath but lookt into the Histories of times past, shall readily observe all Ages greatly propense to observe Natures strayings from her more usual law and rule of operation, and to entertain all strange occurrences with a kinde of Prophetick fear of some great evils impendent, of which they are presumed but the harbingers and *Præcones*. And surely this alone might serve sufficiently to vindicate the observation of Prodigies, at least, from all suspicion of vanity and superstition.

Answ. To deal plainly, there is more of truth in this Objection, then I could wish there were; to which to return; *Magister Errorum Populus*, and that 'tis the office of Learning not to lead us to the multitude but from it; and that a *wise man is the greatest of Prodigies*, would be thought but the best of evasions and the worst of Answers: Though a wiser man then my self, when prest with the same Objection in a like case: [*At omnes Populi, Nationes, utuntur Auspiciis*, &c.] judg'd it beneath any better answer, then this, *Quasi verò quidquam sit tam valdè, quàm nihil sapere, vulgare*. I shall choose rather to enquire into the grounds and reasons of this so Catholick a perswasion; for truth is best strengthned, and errour refuted, *per reductionem ad principia*, by calling men to a view of those principles and grounds from which they grow, and into which they finally do resolve.

Tul. *de Div.* l. 2.

Now then, the Reasons of this so general usage and perswasion, are (I conceive) some or all of these following.

1. *Men* (for the greater part) *are wholly strangers to the causes of these prodigious accidents*. Now as *fear hath torment*, so ignorance hath fear. It is a certain rule, *Nihil æquè facit hominem multa suspicari ac nihil scire*. Where we are unprovided of any prenotions of the qualities of objects or persons, Nature hath made us all very suspicious, and fearfull to touch, taste, and trust. Persons in the dark are full of monstrous conceits, every shadow is a devil, and every bush a thief to them: And the more men are in the dark as to the knowledge of causes, still the more jealous and fearfull of Events: Now the most

1 Joh. 4. 19.

---Pueri trepidant, atque omnia cæcis
In tenebris metuunt.---

of

of men are very ignorant, and therefore superstitiously fearfull upon any such irregular events in Nature.

----Formido mortales continet omnes,
Quòd multa in terris fieri cælóque tuentur;
Quorum operum causas nullâ ratione videre
Possunt: Lucret.

The Fools Purgatory is as familiar as the Fools Paradise; Ignorance calls every unaccountable Symptom (in the Patient) witchcraft, and every strange accident, a Prodigy. Besides it is the usage of ignorance, especially where the objects are great, vehement, and extraordinary, which fall before it, to conceit a kinde of Divinity dwelling in them, and to regard them as examples of some vertue and power superiour to Natural. *Hippocrates* tells us, that sad disease (in Physick stiled *morbus sacer*, the holy or divine disease) took its appellation hence, Ἄνθρωποι ἐνόμισαν θεῖον εἶναι διὰ ἀπειρίης καὶ θαυμασιότητος. Men called it divine, from ignorance, and a blinde wonderment at the strange and vehement symptoms thereof. Moreover, it is the nature of ignorance to produce (as diffidence in the heart, so withall) confidence in the head; for those which know least of things past or present, are usually the most confident determiners concerning things future. Upon this account the multitude (to which knowledge was never very friendly) cannot but be greatly impressive to any great and religious perswasions concerning prodigies; (especially if much forc't upon them by the importunity of bold men)

Wisd. 17. 13. Τὸ μὲν φόβητρον, μήδε κοινὸν, ἀλλ' ἀδοξοναστεχνῶς, καὶ παραμυθασιμόν, εἰς ἀφορμὴν ὀρθοῦ καὶ ἀναγωγὰς ἐπαλήθευε καὶ σιβυλλῶν τὸν πολλούς. *Plut.* περὶ μὲν χρᾶν Hippocrat. *de morb. sacro.*

2. *It is the Nature of guilt to be quickly awakened into a fear of an approaching evil:* It sleeps (as they say of the Hare) with its eyes open, quickly awake to see or phansie an impendent evil, how secure soever it may seem to it self, or others. Guilt is upon every slight occasion Μάντις κακῶν, never propheſying good concerning men, but evil; It will fly when none pursues. There go usually along with a guilty breast (when fair colours hang out in the face) black jealousies and fears, a φοβερὰ τις ἐνδοχὴ κρίσεως, a *fearfull expectation of vengeance*, and therefore (like *Belshazzar*) where it cannot distinctly expound Gods strange characters, it yet concludes the general intention to be Wrath and judgement. The Authour of the *Book of Wisdom*, hath therefore well expreſt the Nature of guilt, thus, *Wickedness condemned of her own witness, is very timerous; and being pressed with conscience, always forecasteth terrible things.*

Wisd. 17. 11. *Ad monstri conspectum omnes plerunque subitò exhorrescunt, veluti conscientiam stimulo peccati vulneratam agnoscentes, atque de irâ Dei vel in antecedentibus animadversâ, vel in futuris negotiis metuendâ singuli cogitent.* S. Aug. *lib. de Civit. Dei.*

Guilt hath an injured God always presented to it, now where our lives and fortunes are in the hand of offended greatness, we think more frequently what it may, then what it will do with us. Where men mistrust (as guilt generally doth) every *nutus*, words good or bad, all actions, but especially such as are to us obscure and unaccountable, are the seed of jealousie. Guilt can spell death out of Gods sweetest promises, much more out of his dark and intricate providences.

3. *The strict observation of Prodigies hath risen from the application of a humane measure to divine actings.* All actions of consequence done in

the world by humane Agents, come forth *cum magnâ phonâ* with observation, they are usually prefac't with somewhat which may raise expectation, and give notice. *Seneca* speaks of a *pompa mortis*, there is also a *pompa vitæ*: Men use not *cadere in negotia sed descendere*; and their actions of moment, though they have sometimes *abruptos fines*, yet it is seldom that they have *abrupta principia*: Now it is accordingly thought, that all Gods actions of remark, must be stampt with a humane signature; be ushered with the pomp and solemnity of some prodigious and preternatural occurrences. Whereas God hath threatned not onely to destroy bad men by his judgements, but to surprise them, to storm them without a precedent Summons. We read of nothing in the *Rev.* to be concealed from men, but what judgements the *seven thunders uttered*. God often by prophecies and mighty signs warned former Ages, & expects now that former Ages should warn us.

1 Thes. 5. 3.

Psa. 64. 7. 37.

Rev. 10. 4.

1 Cor. 10. 6, 11.

There is no one thing which hath set up such a multitude of idols, vain and fantastical conceits (as the excellent *Verulam* observes) in Philosophy, *quàm naturalium operationum ad similitudinem actionum humanarum reductio*; the reducing of all natural operations to a likeness with the acts of men, and the preferring of man (the lesser world) as the great glass of Nature, in whose fabrick and actions, the similar images & imitations of all things in the greater world should be represented. And to as many vain imaginations in *Divinity* hath the making (as it were) of God after their own image, and fastning upon him either εἶδος or πάθος, or ἦθος ἀνθρώπινον, and proposing of the customs, reasonings, and counsels of men, as the *Jacobs* staff, to estimate the height and extent of the counsels and actions of God, (whose ways and thoughts, as we are told, are not laid by any of those short lines which ours are) expos'd men.

Aug. Scient. l. 5. c. 4.

Isa. 55. 9.

4. *Men are greatly propense to close with any flattering medium to arrive at the much desired knowledge of things to come.* The more the fruit of the *Tree of knowledge* is plac't beyond our reach, the more impatient desires after it use to rise up in our minds; Now such is the knowledge of things wrapt up in futurity. Hence *Astrology* (which feeds men with the aery hopes of this knowledge) so valuable a science with the the *Chaldeans*; *Oracles* so much attended to by the *Grecians*; *Auguries*, by the *Romans*; any kinde of *Prophets* by the *Hebrews*: the σημεῖα σημαντα auspicious signs amongst the ruder *Heathens*: In short *Tully* hath noted, that no King nor People ever was there with whom some presumed divine predictions, were not in use and credit: to which I further add, that it is hard to mention that thing (necessary or contingent) upon which the Ethnick vanity had not affixt some signification and presage or other. Nay, and even in very good men (in sacred writ) we finde not this itch after the knowledge of the condition of future times, sufficiently kil'd.

Qui Rex unquam fuit, quis populus qui non uteretur prædictione divina? Tul. *l.* 1. *de Divin.*

This desire of knowing things future, is owing partly to that mighty thirst in the soul after knowledge in the latitude thereof; partly to a secret distrust of Providence, which we cannot endure to follow even blind-fold, like *Abraham*, *not knowing whither we go*; partly to our natural restlesness in uncertainties, and the souls not enduring a perpetual

Dan. 12. 8. Mat. 24. 3. 1 Thes. 5. 1. Joh. 21. 21, 22.

petual crucifixion between hopes and fears; partly to that impressiveness of spirit which times of action and change (for in such prodigies and prophecies are most critically recorded) are generally attended with; as also to that *nausea* which the tedious repetition of things present and familiar, creates the soul of man. For these reasons, men are very ready to attend to a Prodigy as to a kinde of silent Oracle, to resolve them in their enquiries *de futuro*, which is indeed but profanely to go to God, whose work it is, as they would to a common Fortune-teller.

To dismiss this particular, There are especially two sorts of things which command our minds to the most quick and serious attendences. 1. *Things rare and extraordinary*, Oracles, Mysteries, New notions, curious Arts, Secrets, Stories of Apparitions. 2. *Predictions and Divinations*: for we shall observe the soul especially delighted in its enquiries into times far past, and long hence to come; whereby it grasps (in a kinde of petty infinity) both the ends of time at once. Now then, Prodigies may quickly call forth the serious notices and regards of the *most*, as being *mira*, matters (in themselves) rare and wonderfull, and also (in common opinion) *monstra*, things which can shew them what is to come, and to lift the soul above the narrow *Horizon* of things present and sensible, which it hath so often surfetted and cloy'd it self withall.

5. *The hand of Joab* (the Agency of the devil) *seems not a little engaged in this business* [the strengthning of this opinion of Prodigies, with which the minds of men are so much possest] For he serves no small ends upon Persons entertained with such observances. By such curious ways he calls men off from more necessary searches and enquiries. Humble ignorance (he knows) in matters too high for us, is a fruitfull mother of devotion: He tempts men, like the fly, into the fire by setting the appeareances and hopes of a greater light before them. Besides, he works men hereby into servile and superstitious apprehensions of God; for the Opinion of such prodigies, represents him before the soul, with a rod of Vengeance perpetually in his hand. A belief of a God, is that fort which the Devill could never storm (force by any direct temptation) and therefore he designs by such terrible and servile conceits wrought in the hearts of men, to undermine it: For perpetual jealousies and slavish fears of God (like over-heated waters) boyl over at last, and extinguish (that fire) that faith and sense of God, which first produc't them; when the Notion of a Deity stands alway before the mind (like a *Gorgons* head) pregnant with nothing but horrours and dismays, it quickly works and turns it to a (stony) stupid neglect of Him; so to get rid of that Οἰκεῖον Δαιμόνιον, that mighty fear which was its continuall Executioner.

More-over, the Devil (no doubt) loves to bring men off from a noble and generous temper: And as it is the design of Religion to cast out fear, and to introduce a spirit of true freedome and confidence toward God, so it is the work of the Devil to call on a *spirit of bondage* and fear, that so he may see in men the more lively and ex-

preſs images and pourtraitures of himſelf, who *believes and trembles*. He would have his rites of worſhip of old, *φρικώδεα μυστήρια*, frightfull and amazing myſteries; the Idols wherein he was worſhipt, bear in their very names and titles a remembrance of that baſeneſs and ſervility of ſpirit which attended his votaries in the ſervice of ſo abſolute a Tyrant, (being ſtil'd ſometimes, מפלצות *horrours* (as 'tis rendred in the margin. 2 Chron. 15. 16.) ſometimes, עצבים and, אימים ſignifying *trouble* and *terrour*,) and the Devils are ſtil'd, שעירים coming from a word which ſignifies *horrere*, becauſe uſually tendering themſelves to view in the moſt frightfull forms.

If. 40. 5. Jer. 50. 38. Pſ. 106. 36.

Now this ſuperſtitious perſwaſion of Prodigies, doth hugely miniſter to bondage of ſpirit, and tends to ſeal men with a mark of *Cain* (according to the Jews) a perpetual trembling and aſtoniſhment. The obſervation of prodigies proving ſo ſerviceable to the dark kingdom, if the experience of former times ſeem at all to credit and recommend it, I ſhould be ready to aſſert that of them, which S. *Bernard* doth of Dreams *Ex aſtu Diaboli aliquando vera pronunciant, ut toties in multis fallant*; through the ſubtile agency of the Devil, they appear to declare truth ſometimes, that they may the oftner abuſe men with vain hopes or fears, with the leſs ſuſpicion afterward.

Serm. 68. De ſomniis.

6. This common perſwaſion in men, *is owing very much to the power and Magiſterial authority of a traditional ſuperſtition, handed down from the very firſt times of Gentile ignorance.* There may very eaſily be a *Cabala Errorum*, though hardly a *Cabala Veritatum*; Our Nature in this laps't ſtate (as the ground to weeds) being a Mother to errour, but (as that to good corn) a Step-mother to truth. How apt our Nature is to catch and propagate the infection of a ſuperſtitious tradition, may appear from that ancient and modern uſage of *praying for a Perſon upon neezeing, the vulgar preſages conſequent to the approach of any ſtrange fiſh to our ſhore, the regarding of any caſual ſtops and breaches in any known Rivers, any odd noyſes heard in the ſilences of the night, and births ſeal'd with the odd figures of an ungovern'd imagination*, and many more (too mouldy with age to ſet before the Reader) receiv'd of old among the Heathens, and at this day among too many Chriſtians, as Divine Monitours, and as Natures ſtarting out of its uſual road (like the *Aſſe* in ſacred Writ) becauſe ſome deſtroying *Angel* ſtands juſt before it.

We ſhall find theſe and the like alterations in Nature, conſequent to the death of *Cæſar*, and precedent to the battail at *Philippi*, recorded with the great regards of the Heathen Poet,

Tempore quanquam illo Tellus quoque & æquora Ponti,
Obſcœnique Canes, importunæque Volucres
Signa dabant ——
Vox quoque per lucos vulgo exaudita ſilentes
Ingens ——
Infandum! ſiſtunt amnes, terræque dehiſcunt, &c.

Virgil. Georg. l. 1.

That which poſſibly *aſſiſted* this tradition, was the ſucceeding of *Rome Chriſtian*, as into the place, ſo into very many of the rites and uſages of *Rome Pagan*, (as might be eaſily made appear at large were

were that our buſineſs) and into as large a power over the faiths and conſciences of men, as *Rome Pagan* had over their bodies, and ſo was enabled to mold them into what Opinions or practices, they might beſt ſerve themſelves upon.

7 *The private Opinions of ſome contemplative Perſons, may (poſſibly) not a little encourage and ſtrengthen the perſwaſion of preſages by Prodigies.*

Thoſe which conceive the Angels, as a kind of Heavenly *Intelligencers* always at hand to admoniſh and inform us, when (through the ſagacity of their Nature) they eſpie a *cloud* of vengeance, (as yet but *as big as a mans hand.*) ready to overſpread Heaven, and to fall down upon men, may (without much forcing) perſwade themſelves that all theſe unuſual occurrences are owing to their courteous Agency, deſigning by them to warn men by repentance to *flie from the wrath* approaching.

Others again ſeem to me to apprehend the World, as a kinde of of *Great Animal*, inform'd by a very ſubtile and apprehenſive Spirit, which out of a hidden and inexplicable ſenſe of an impendent evil, (as many creatures have of an approaching ſtorm) ſtarts (as it were) and ſhrinks in, and in its ſeveral parts, ſuffers mighty emotions and diſturbances. But this notion, will (perhaps) look more temptingly, when preſented to us as the Parents thereof are pleas'd to dreſs it forth. *There is (ſaith a late writer) that ſympathy and fellow-feeling which God hath put in his whole creation, whereby each part hath a care of the whole, and according to its meaſure, doth endeavour its preſervation. As in the body natural of man, upon the next and immediate approach of death ſome parts are put into ſuddain tremblings, and convulſions, whereby they diſcover the nearneſs, and, as far as they can, labour to prevent the danger of that Enemy: So God hath order'd it in the Great body of the World, that Earthquakes like convulſions, Eclipſes (like fallings of the eyes) and ſuch other unuſual Prodigies, (which have an analogy and reſemblance to the accidents of the body of man) ſhould commonly precede that ruine, wherein any one State or Nation is finally to be involv'd. As when our Saviour died, the ſun was darkned*, the rocks were rent, the Earth ſhook, *by a kinde of natural ſympathy and compaſſionate horrour, at ſo dreadfull and amazing a ſpectacle: So when* Hieruſalem *was to be deſtroyed, Our Saviour himſelf foretells* that there ſhould be Earth-quakes, and famines, and peſtilences, and fearfull ſights, and great ſigns, *as the Van-carriers and Out-guard to that more terrible deſolation, which was to follow them. What the Apoſtle therefore ſays elegantly concerning future Glory*, that the whole creation *which was made* ſubject to vanity *and miſery for mans ſin, doth* groan *and, (as it were)* travail in pain *untill it be deliver'd from* the bondage of corruption, and *manu-mitted or ſet free to* pertake of the glorious liberty of the ſons of God; *ſo while it is in the ſtate of vanity, God hath put into it ſuch a quick ſenſe, that not one part can grieve, but it will after a ſort grieve together, and diſcover by its tremblings, ſhakings, eclipſes, and extraordinary changes, that there is ſome great judgement a coming.*

The pretty allegories, and alluſions of which Diſcourſe (but the waſhing of weak and rotten ſtuff) might poſſibly ſhew not unhandſomely in an oration, but are two aery and thin for a ſermon, as the

hony under the law, might be of use at the *table*, but was too frothy and luscious for the *Altar*: As for that vanity now upon the creation, it is solely passive therein, and subject to it; and as for that vizard upon the face of Nature, those direfull and amazing alterations in the frame of the world, which attended our Saviours death, and the fates of *Hierusalem*, they are instances (concluded) miraculous and extraordinary, (whose return may be expected with their occasions) and so are so far from coming up to, that they scarce look towards our present case, as shall appear more fully in due place:

8. *It is the Nature of the Soul to be greatly impressive to a perswasion of parallels, equalities, similitudes, in the frame and Government of the World:* and that (indeed) so far, as to make them (by the poesy of phancy) where it cannot really discover them; that so it may please and solace it self in some supposed lines and figures of its own uniform and harmonious nature pourtray'd upon the world; and 'twere easy to shew how this temper hath betray'd it to a great many pretty dreams, both in science and common life.

This being the general temper of the Soul, it is easily inclin'd to believe great and mighty changes in states, usher'd with the solemnity of some mighty and analogous changes in Nature, and that all terrible evils are prefac't or attended with some prodigious and amazing alterations in the creation; that so the black and dreadfull dress of the stage, may be correspondent to the tragical part shortly to be acted thereupon. The minde readily apprehends it a great *Decorum*, to imagine the children of the creation trembling, and looking gastly, and running out of their places when their Father is just a taking of the rod of vengeance into his hand. Hence perhaps it is, that we generally finde great troubles and judgements on Earth, describ'd, especiall by persons ecstatical (Prophets and Poets) whose speeches usually rather follow *Sensum animæ quàm veritatem rei*, by all the examples of horrour and confusion, in the frame of the creation. The prophet David describes Gods going forth to judgement, thus, *the Earth shook and trembled, the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth, &c.* and the Apocryphal Prophet *Esdras*, characters the horrours of an approaching judgement, by predictions of (the most proper glasses to represent them) dreadfull accidents in the World, *Bloud shall drop out of the wood, and the stone shall give his voyce, the sea of Sodom shal cast out fish, and make a noyse in the night, &c.* So the day of God's vengeance upon *Hierusalem*, and (in that, as its type) upon the whole World, is describ'd (as some think) but figuratively, in the phrase of *turning the sun into darkness and the moon into bloud.* such expressions being correspondent to the sense of the Soul, which conceives it most proper that there appear no smiles in the face of Nature, but that she come forth cloth'd with terrour and amazement, when some great vengeance and destruction is present or at hand.

Ps. 18. 7.

2 Esdr. 5 5. 6, 7, 8.

Act. 2. 20.

This disposition of Soul, doth never more strongly exert it self, then when the Prodigies (being no unfitting emblems of the judgement) doe impregnate imagination, and offer a mighty assistance thereunto

unto: Thus, (as 'tis call'd) the raining of bloud (which is but water tinctur'd by the condition of the soyl whence it ariseth, or, rather, where it falls) shall strongly sollicite the fear of some great effusion of bloud in the state; the appearance of two Suns at once, (which is but the figure and glory of the Sun drawn by its own beams upon a disposed cloud) doth greatly encourage the phancy of two Competitours for Royalty in a Nation; some great Eclypse seems (to a soft imagination) to hang the world with black against the approaching funeralls of some Great Person; the Casual parting of the River *Ouse* in *Bedfordshire*, seem'd (after the event) a prelage of the succeeding division between the house of *York* and *Lancaster*. These and many more, where they meet with an imagination strong enough to supply and relieve their weakness, shall prove an event beyond *Geometry*, and the Reasons and experience of all men and times.

9. *Humane Nature is greatly propense to entertain things vehement and extraordinary with an Opinion of a more then ordinary sacredness in, and presence of God with them.* In the Old Testament, things more vulgar and accommodate to a humane size and measure, had the name of Man call'd upon them; thus we read of the *Rod of a Man*, 2 Sam. 7. 14. *the cords of a Man*, Hos. 11. 4. *the pen of a Man*. Is. 8. 1. that is gentle, and usual: on the other side, things rare and which hardly admit their pattern, are attributed unto God, *Horeb the Mount of God*. Exod. 3. 1. *the River of God*. Ps. 65. 9. *the trees of God* Ps. 104. 16. *the fire of God* Job. 1. 6. that is, great and extraordinary. Now the ancient Hebrews (to whose law of speaking the Holy Ghost accommodates himself) in their customes and language, seem to make the truest report of the easy sentiments of simple Nature.

Accordingly, these strange and prodigious alterations in Nature, appear to men, (because not of familiar occurrences) stampt with some Characters and touches of Divinity; and so apt to raise a great opinion of themselves in men, as if sent forth upon no less errand then to call them to an expectation of some strange work from God.

Pessimum omnium est augurium quod ex consensu capitur, in rebus intellectualibus, &c. nihil enim multis placet nisi imaginationem feriat, aut intellectum vulgarium notionum nodis astringat. Verul. Nov. Org. Aph. 77.

From what hath been hitherto discourst, 'tis easy to infer the fallacie of that First Argument (against us) taken *from the common perswasions of men*. For it is a perswasion very general indeed, but growing not from natural but casual or abusive principles; And in such a case, the more common and prevalent the perswasion be, the more dangerous, because it derives a great credit upon errour, and gives it the colour of an Oracle. *Vox populi* is a fallacious topick to conclude from, except the Opinion generally maintain'd cross the ease and interest of the World, and men *like Uriah* carry the letters, (the Principles) which judge and condemn themselves [*as the common notions concerning Good and evil, of the Existence of a Deity, a Future judgement, the Souls immortality, &c.*] 'tis in this case a sign that the truth is seal'd upon the Natures of men, and rather lays hold of them, then they of it.

And this in answer to that first objection.

SECT.

CHAP. IV.

The Objection grounded on humane authority answer'd.

The testimonies of Heathens, Fathers, Modern *writers, alledg'd against the truth contended for: Answer'd, first more Generally, some account given why so many learned men have given countenance to the contrary perswasion. A particular return to the testimony of* Herodotus. *Heathens greatly fond of this notion, and why. The* Fathers *no great favourers of this Doctrine. The Testimony of* Tertullian *unserviceable to our Adversaries. S.* Austin *expres's against them. The testimony of* Machiavel *disabled by a three fold consideration. D.* Jackson, *whence (in probability) so inclinable to the regard of Prodigies; some account of his lost book of* Prodigies. *The ill use the Heathens made of Prodigies, the observation of them unbecoming our Religion, and a dishonour to God.*

ARguments from humane Authority, generally shew better in *Rhetorick* then *Logick*, and press the *modesties* of men more then their *Judgements*. Yet, because the *Most* judge altogether by their *Proxies*, and are apt to suspect fallacies in strong reasons, but none in Great names, I shall next make answer to a second Objection with which this truth is assaulted, viz. the *Testimony of learned writers* [*Heathens, Fathers, Modern Authours*] to the contrary: where, two of each kinde it may suffice to take as the representatives of the Rest.

Φιλέει θεὸς προσημαίνειν ἐὸν τὸν μέλλη μεγάλα κακὰ ἢ πόλι ἢ ἔθνεϊ ἔσεσθαι. l. 6. c. 27.

Among *Heathen Writers*, *Herodotus* seems to our Adversaries of especial remark in this Argument, entering it as a try'd case *Quoties ingentes eventuræ sunt calamitates vel civitati, vel nationi, solent signis prænunciari*, and *Valerius Maximus* seems to subscribe the Opinion in that whole chapter which he hath written *De Prodigiis*, and the Regards due to them.

Cuncta animalia humanis usibus subdita, &c. non solum aliorum, verum etiam Dominorum aversabantur accessum, non sine exitio aut periculo audentis, si quis de proximo urgeret. De Civit. Dei. l. 3. c. 23.

Among the *Fathers*, we finde *Tertullian* telling the Heathens (deriding the Christian Doctrine of an Everlasting fire) of some prodigious Mountains always burning; upon occasion whereof, He adds, *hoc erit testimonium ignis æterni, hoc exemplum judicii; pœnam nutrientes Montes uruntur & durant*. And S. *Austin* having noted that a little before the *Bellum Sociale* in the Romane Empire, dogs, horses, oxen, asses, and such like creatures (usually the most submissive subjects to the law of obedience to man) all on a suddain, put off their gentle and tractable Natures, ran away from their owners, grew fierce and hurtfull, and approacht as near to Lyons and Wolves as their shapes and figures would permit: of which strange occurrence, He thus delivers his sense, *Quòd si hoc signum fuit quòd tantum malum fuit, quantum malum fuit illud, cujus hoc signum fuit!* Amongst *Modern Writers*, *Machiavel*, (a Person generally thought a more fast retainer to Atheism then superstition) hath thus abetted the observation of Prodigies, *Ut causam facile confitebor me ignorare, ita rem ipsam cùm ex antiquis tum novis exemplis agnoscere oportet & confiteri, omnes magnos motus*

quicunque

quicunque aut ubi aut Regioni evenerunt, vel à consectoribus, vel à Revelatione aliqua, prodigia aut cœlestibus signis prædici & prænunciari solere

so whom may be added (to pass by *Luther, Melanthon, Camerarius* and others) the Testimony of the Reverend *D. Jackson*: *The manner* (saith He) *of Gods forewarning is very various; sometimes he forewarns by signs in the sun and moon, sometimes by apparitions in the air, sometimes by monstrous births, sometimes He makes the murrain of Cattel, and Mortality of beasts in the fields, or birds of the ayr, fore-runners of plagues and wars, &c.* And so far received he them, *ὡς Θεῖα προσημαίνοντα* (as *Eusebius* stiles the *Portenta* preceding the overthrow of *Hierusalem*) Gods visible Sermons of Repentance, that as we are inform'd He wrote a just Treatise (lost in his life-time) concerning *Prodigies or Divine Foremarkings betokening Blood.*

Serm. on Luk. c. 13. 6, 7, 8.

Vid. Prefat. to his Book of the eternal truth of Scripture. Edit. 1653.

To all which Testimonies, my answer shall be, first more General: That 'tis no wonder to see this Opinion credited by some Great names, in regard that as in Heresy, *Populus sequitur Doctiores*, the People usually follow the Learned, as being (in a matter more abstract and subtile) more apt to believe then to judge; so in Superstition, *Doctiores sequuntur Populum*, the Learned are (not seldom) observ'd to follow the People; because easily surpris'd into an Opinion that can enter so valuable a plea for it self as common consent. This Notion of Presages by Prodigies being so popular and catholick, wise men (in their first and unwary years, when they are *discipuli plebis*) may entertain conceits thereof which shall plead prescription against the strongest reasons to dispossess them. As Iron in a greater and more massy bodie, *sequitur naturam communem*, follows the law of common Nature in all heavy bodies, and moves to the Earth; but in smaller pieces, *sequitur naturam privatam*, it follows its own private nature, and directs it self to the Loadstone; Thus learned men, where they are prest by the force and weight of Education, and a common prejudice, generally follow common Nature in men, (which inclines to embrace Society) and therefore move in judgment, *Secundum vitam Terræ*; but in matters out of vulgar ken, and where they cannot be tempted by a common agreement they move *secundum vitam consilii*, and pertue the dictates of their own private light and understanding. Even wise men, (in many instances) held *aras & focos*, their faith and their estates, by the same tenure, *tradition from Ancestors*, and therefore we may receive their judgements (*tanquam ex Cathedrâ*) as engagements to consider (not always *tanquam ex Tripode*) as obligations to believe.

I proceed next to a more distinct and particular answer to the severall Authorities alledg'd. And first to the Testimony of *Heathens*. The many places of Scripture wherein God hath threatned to issue out a speedy arrest upon Persons deeply indebted to him, without so much as warning them by any lesser judgements and signs of Vengeance, to agree with Him while in the way, doe sufficiently resolve me of the vanity of that forementioned assertion of *Herodotus*, Verbera chiefly is the world upon solemn fasting days of great experience and our Adversaries build so much upon a wide return (which is a conclusion which proceeds upon the grosse of a single instance)

that of the people of *Chios* there mentioned, whose final desolation was usher'd by two very affecting examples; One, that of a hundred young men whom they sent to *Delphos*, two onely return'd, the rest being consumed by Pestilence; another, (but a little after the same time) the roof of the School-house fell so suddainly, that of an hundred and twenty children, but one escap'd with life. Of which He saith *τάδε μὲν οὖν ἅπαντα ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν ἐγένετο* these signs God foreshew'd their approaching fate withall. Now with this so shallow and contracted a foundation, he ventures the building of his Catholick assertion. *Quoties ingentes, &c.* A thing not much to be wonder'd at, because where men are very fond of an assum'd principle, any single example which speaks favour for it, (shall be more attended unto, then a hundred which disparage and refute it: Besides, one *Affirmative* (especially, if plausible, as this is) doth far more affect and engage our minds, then (many more evident) Negatives, because they are infinite, disperse our sight, and deliver us to uncertainty.

2. 'Tis no *wonder at all to meet with such an assertion amongst Heathens and any little Accidents blown out by a superstitious phancy, into the form and appearance of strange Omens*, if we consider; *how they look upon their Gods as a kinde of Fayries*, which would throw firebrands and furies about the house, for the omission of some petty criticisms in their rites, and that (therefore) they gave forth frequent intimations of these impotencies and distasts. They thought they were lost with a trifle, and won again to a good Opinion of them by paying them the homage of a little crouching and circumstantial Devotion.

Majores nostros deprehendes initia esse ritus omnium religionum vel ut remuneraretur Divina indulgentia, vel ut averteretur imminens ira, aut ut jam tumens & sæviens placaretur: Minut. Fel.

3. *The hopes and fortunes of the Heathens were layd up generally in this world, and therefore their fears in reference to it, were easily awakened.* The Heathen *Cæcilius* (truly) acknowledg'd, that all the religious rites instituted by their Ancestours, were level'd to no higher an end then the good of this lower life; being either intended as gratefull returns to the Divine bounty for some temporal favours receiv'd, or devout addresses to divert a feared, or appease a felt displeasure of the Deity. And therefore no wonder, they were soon awaken'd into a great fear when any strange occurrence (of whose end and cause they were unresolv'd) fell before their notice; least it should abode the running of that vessel upon rocks, wherein their hopes and happiness were imbark't. Men are apt to entertain great fear in reference to that wherein they apprehend themselves greatly concern'd.

To the testimony of *Fathers* I answer (in General) that 'twere no wonder to find them (living so near the times of Gentilism) speaking in favour sometimes, for some of the Doctrines thereof; the main trunck and body of the Gentile superstition, was indeed hewn down in their minds, but still there were some small roots and fibres remaining, which are observ'd to spring up ever and anon, and trouble their writings. But however we shall (I believe) seldom find them expressing any great regard to this grand doctrine of the

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Theology.

As for *Tertullian*, howsoever he may seem (like some carved images about houses) to support and grace our adversaries building, yet he will prove (in truth) to be like them barely forc't and fasten'd on, and to lend no strength at all thereunto; for 1. the Father writing to the Heathens there, might lawfully discourse with them *Ex hypothesi Ethnicæ Theologiæ*; for they regarded those mighty *Vulcanos* as the courts of *Pluto*, and a kind of testimony or fit emblem of the fires and vengeance in another state. 2. He stiles these fires eruptions, but *testimonium & exemplum*, a testimony and example of the Divine judgment, which in a laxe sense he might well doe, these seeming to be set forth by the Divine wisdom, as glasses and pictures to convey to the duller world some weak images of the horrours of those everlasting burnings in another world. 3. These durable fires are alledged not as any signs of an everlasting burning, but as the best argument Nature afforded to prove the possibility of such a burning against the sons of Nature, who thought a fire which consumes not, to be a great contradiction. And to a like purpose we find the very same instances alledg'd against them by another of the Ancients. *Sicut ignes fulminum corpora tangunt nec absumunt, sicut ignes Ætnæ & Vesuvii & ardentium ubique terrarum flagrant nec erogantur; ita pœnale illud incendium non damnis ardentium patescunt, sed inexesa corporum tatevatione nutritur.* *Minut. Fel.*

To the testimony of S. *Austin*, I answer, 1. That strange occurrence (by him mention'd) might possibly appear to him cloth'd in more significant circumstances then to us it doth; who cannot but look at the suddain *Mania*, of so many creatures but as the natural, though more unusual effect, which in those hotter climates, the unfitting season of the year might possibly have upon them. 2. He speaks but doubtfully thereof, *Hoc si signum fuit*. 3. But if our adversaries appeal to S. *Austin*, to S. *Austin* shall they goe. Who (in his more awaken'd thoughts) thus delivereth himself in defiance of all such Ominous observations,

Monstra *dicta sunt à Monstrando, quod aliquid significando demonstrent*, & Ostenta *ab Ostendendo*, Portenta *à portendendo, id est, præostendendo*, & Prodigia *quod porro dicant, id est futura prædicant. Sed viderint eorum conjectores quomodo ex iis sive fallantur, sive instinctu Spirituum (quibus curæ est, tali pœna dignos animos hominum noxiæ curiositatis retibus implicare) vera prædicant, sive multa dicendo aliquando in aliquid veritatis incurrant.* S. *Augusti.* De Civit. Dei l. 28. c. 8.

The testimony of *Machiavel* will appear, of no great moment, in this Argument if it be considered, 1. *Those signs which he hath noted in the same chapter as the præcursors of some great evils, are vain, beyond the visions of a feaver, and the whispers of the wind*; for he there tells us that the death of *Lorenzo de Medices*, the Founder of the Dukedom of *Tuscany* in his family, was portended by the defaceing of their Great Temple in *Florence*, by fire from heaven; and the Banishment of *Petrus Soderinus* (one of the Pillars of State) by the burning of the Senate house by lightning. [*Traterden Steeple and Goodwin Sands*] we may conclude by these ears that the whole

whole harvest of his other observations, he grounded his fore-mentioned speech upon, was little besides chaff and husk.

2. *The suspicion of Atheism, renders him also not a little to the suspicion of Superstition.* The Heathens of old styl'd (Ἄθεοι ἐν κόσμῳ) Atheists in the world, were the most superstitious observers of presages and *Omens.* They which live most in neglect of God, think they see tokens of a divine *Nemesis*, in every strange accident they behold. Superstition and Atheism (like water and ice) produce one another; slavish and superstitious fears of God, leading to Atheism as their cure, and Atheism leading to greater fears of him, as its deserved punishment. 'Tis a great justice, that that wickedness should be punished with false fears, which hath discarded the true. They which will not fear God, and hell, and sin, shall fear a Prodigie; being therein like the *horse* (to which they stand compared, *Jer.* 8. 6.) which will start at its shadow, and yet *rush* (furiously and without fear) *into the battel.*

Eph. 2. 12.

Levit. 26. 36.

3. *Man is born to trouble as the sparks flie upward.* The *wheel* of Providence is continually going over Kingdoms and Persons. The world (like *Mount Calvary*) presents us with nothing almost but crosses and deaths, spectacles of misery, [Heaven onely *is a Kingdom that cannot be shaken*;] and therefore, no wonder if any unusual accidents be soon seconded by some tragedy or other, though never intended its Prologue, and precedent Monitour.

The errour (as I doubt not to style it) of the Reverend Doctour *Jackson* in this argument, may be easily pardoned to his singular piety and learning; the light and lustre of which (like that of the Sun) may easily hide any of his spots and blemishes from the severer eyes and notices of the world. Great minds (like the heavenly bodies) though they are moved (for the main) with the force of the *Primum mobile*, the weight and evidence of truth; yet they appear sometimes to have their *declinationes proprias*, some private motions and declinations of their own, to which their peculiar *Genius*, impressions from the Age, or their education may very fatally betray them. This opinion concerning Prodigies, and signs of events future (which the general strain of his writings speaks his minde hugely possessed and dy'd withall) I am ready to reckon amongst those *Idola specus*, false notions, which the black and melancholy mansion his excellent soul plainly appears to have dwelt in, did abuse his minde withall. Any events extraordinary in the world, seem all along to have had a great impression upon his soul, and seem expounded sometimes a little more particularly then their just value and moments will well warrant and allow. Melancholy is of a very impressive temper, and poetick nature, and is apt (like a dark room) to receive in the images of objects without, in very monstrous and antick figures and representations.

*Joh. Polycar. his *Tract. Tragic. Camerar. de Ostent. Peucer. his Teratoscos.

As for his *Book of Prodigies* mentioned, I profess my self not greatly tempted to follow its casualties, with any deep sighs; and that not onely because mens understandings have been too much undervalued by *books of that Nature, already extant to a number sufficient to a

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cure of the most troublesome curiosity in such enquiries; but

1. *Because the few Prodigies and signs of times commended with a great seriousness to our notices in his Sermons on* Luke (taken for the greatest part, out of *Herodotus, Livie, Valer. Max.* and *Machiavel*) will appear to any man (that doth not use to start at shadows) too thin and weak to bear up any such weighty and serious conclusions, as he teacheth his Reader to build upon them, (the knowledge whereof, I had rather should be owing to the Readers curiosity, then to my rehearsal.) Now I think we may make some judgement of the value of the whole piece, by the courseness of a Remnant thereof. Ch. 13.5. & c.21.25.

2. *Because it designed an Errorum Apotheosis*, a kinde of consecration of the greatest part of the errours and folkies of the Gentile superstition; as appears in a high degree of probability from those words which fall from him in the fore-cited papers, where (speaking of such kinde of *Portenta* and signs of heaven, at which the Heathen used to be dismayed) he thus delivers himself: *Though to believe as much concerning the signs of the times, as the Heathens did, though to make as good or better use of them then they did, be not sufficient to acquit us from ruine and destruction fore-signified: yet, not to believe as much as they did, not to make so good an use as they did, not to be so much affected as they were, is enough and more then enough to condemn us, enough to bring that ruine and calamity which they portend or fore-signifie, inevitably and in full measure upon us.* A strange speech! What is this but to set Christians, *aurum colligere ex stercore*, (as *Virgil* said he did, when reading of *Ennius*) to gather the gold of devout fears, and Christian foresights from the dung and dross of all the Ethnick *Ostenta*, and auspicious observations where-ever occurring? For my own part, were I under the Religion of any such perswasion: that *all strange accidents are the warnings of heaven*, I should conclude it a great service to God and the good of men, to exhort (as opportunity invited) the Christian Magistrate to institute some such *Colledges* as the Romanes had, (who received them all, *ut monita deorum*, which should profess themselves *Prodigiorum Interpretes*, and should be ready to offer to the world the most trusty rules and Principles I were master of, to manage their interpretations, so that we might with some assurance conclude the intent and meaning of God in them. As for that good use the Heathens made of these things (wherein they are recommended to our imitation) what was it? did they not receive any strange accidents as the indications whence to proceed to a *crisis* of times, and to put a difference between lucky or inauspicious hours, and days, (as if any times were delivered out of the thoughts and regards of heaven?) Did they not use upon any prodigious event, to consult the (*κόρακα Jovius*) devils Oracles, (a matter pardonable to their *hypothesis*) to understand the intent and meaning of the *gods* in them? Did they not approach the altars of their angry deities, in a nicer observation of all the criticisms of superstition, and the arbitrary injunctions of their religion? Did they not increase to such a body and bulk at last, as to disturb the peace of common life, (where observed and retained) and to bring some men to a discarding of all thoughts of religi- Pag. 16.

on and terrify you kinde of Fairies perpetually haunting their inward house, and bereaving them of all true generousness, peace and freedom of spirit? But where do we ever finde that these pretended alarms from heaven, did awaken men out of that profound sleep which in the darker times of Gentilism they were fallen into, and perswade them (or any others) into correction of their lives and manners? To return,

3. *Because such signs as these are supposed to be, appear greatly unwort hy the Majesty and Wisdom of God.* That Scripture might appear to be Exod. 32,16. מכתב אלהים (in the language of *Moses*) the Writing of God, he hath been pleased to imprint such characters of Divinity both upon the *matter* and *style* thereof, that those weak prenotions we have of infinite Wisdom, Goodness, Majesty do attest and bear witness to it, as worthy and befitting God. And surely were these Prodigies intended Ἄνευ κλαγγῆς, the Heralds of heaven, there would appear (to severe and knowing persons) somewhat able to fill out their name and title, somewhat correspondent to those anticipations which the soul of man hath of what is becoming the Wisdom, Majestie, and Holiness of God. As God cannot be loved, but by appearing before the soul, big with what-ever he hath framed it to embrace and open it self unto; so neither can he be reverenced and observed, but by such displays of himself, which he knows the soul apt to receive, with the most awfull expressions of observance and regard.

Now then what man, that hath any great thoughts of the Majestie of heaven, can once imagine he ever intended any base and deformed monsters, the interpreters of any of his great counsels and purposes? Did God generally under the weak and worldy state of the Jewish Church, send forth those Prophets, whose *learning, education, holy lives, great works, admirable gifts,* commanded even profane men to a reverence of their Persons and message: and doth he now make use of *Monsters, Comets, Meteors,* or the apparitions of unclean spirits, as his *Præsones publici?* Can we ever think that the wise God would have men understand his meaning, when speaking to them by signs, which (like pictures) look to any way, speak to any sense and purpose, the differing fancies of men please? All the signs God ever spake to men by, gave forth (either by their own nature, or his own exposition) λόγον ἔνσημον, a significant speech; the wonders in Egypt, the rites of the Pass-over, the elements in the Sacrament, are all *Signa vocalia*; and the signs and wonders, which (as commonly thought) were Gods trumpets, before he fell upon *Hierusalem*, were all (to speak with *Eusebius*) ἐναργῆ τὰ προσημαίνοντα μέλλοντα ἐφικνεῖσθαι πράγματα, *wonders big with energy, and clearly significative of the approaching desolation.* Eccles. hist. lib. 3. c. 11. Besides, can it be imagined that infinite Goodness, having appointed us a Religion, pregnant with contemplations fit to entertain an *Angel*, levelled to the lifting up of the spirits of men *to that way of life which is above*, that comes forth to give us παρρησίαν πρὸς Θεὸν, freedom of speech and approach unto God, and to chase before it all those pale fears, and jealousies of himself (the dreadfull apparitions which astonish'd men heretofore while sitting *in darkness*

nes and the shadow of death) should now ask us to a devout observation of the familiar miscarriages of Nature in one kinde or other, and to debase our selves to the bondage of some blinde and confused fears of his vengeance, upon the news of a monster, some ludicrous pranks of vile spirits, or a fiery exhalation?

Upon an account of the Premises, (were I inclined to an observation of *Omens* and Prodigies) I should (as Prodigies use to be differently interpreted) make an inverted use of the *Reverend Publisher* of this Great Authours works: [*Reader, write this a Prodigy that this Treatise alone concerning Prodigies, should be lost, and that in the Authours life-time*] and conclude, that God (in favour to the understandings of men) provided, that (like the dead body of *Moses*) it should lie buried, none knowing where, that so it might not be made an *Idol*, of which perhaps the Reverence of so great a name might have inclined some to do.

1 Joh. 3. 11. *In Præfat. suprà laudat.*

I should not have spoken so much, (not to his, but my own prejudice) of so Reverend a Person, but that I am desirous to cut off all the locks, wherein I can but conceive the strength of this superstitious perswasion may lie, which (as weeds do by good ground) tends but to eat out the heart and strength of that devout fear, from which it seems to spring.

SECT. V.

An Answer to the Objection fetcht from Experience.

The Objection proceeding upon experience propoſed, further confirmed from Lucan, Plinie, *others. That plea evinc'd* Unsafe, False, Fallacious: *Men prone to conclude general maxims from a few examples, and why. Some Prodigies mentioned in History, originally* Apologues. *Superstition oft brings the evil it feareth, and Atheism the evil it slights.*

THirdly, It is further opposed, that *common Experience* (the surest corrector of all Idol notions and hastie reasonings) seems to support this perswasion concerning Prodigies. They have always been known succeeded by great evils, and those generally such as they seemed the most natural *Symbols* and representations of. *Lucan* speaking of the tragedies of *Pompey's* fall, and the changes consequent thereunto, describes them ushered by the direfull Prologues of many prodigious alterations in the face of the Creation.

addita fati
Pejora, manifesta fides, superique minaces
Prodigiis terras implerunt, æthera, ponum,
Ignota obscuræ viderunt sidera noctes,
Ardentémque polum flammis, cœlique volamen
Obliquæ per inane faces, crinémque tremendi
Syderis, & terris mutantem regna Cometen.

Pharsal. lib. 1.

Which words, because the Objection is a little concerned in them,

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I shall crave leave of the more serious Reader thus to paraphrase upon them.

Nature misaarries with a fright, and starts
Quite out of order, in her several parts.
At fates foreseen, Mere stars hung in the skie
(The torches to attribute obsequies)
Durst run a race, and rush whilst heavens ire
Had set his very firmament on fire.
A curled star appear'd and Mortals quake,
Whose fear had turn'd each hair into a snake.
A burning Comet did sad fates portend
(Heaven a Kingdome sells at such a rate its end.)

And the Poet goes on there to give us such a catalogue of amazing accidents, which (I think) will hardly obtain the readers pardon (much less his faith) but by extending his Patent of *Poetica licentia* beyond a bare liberty in reference to the quantity of his words.

[a] Besides, experience hath long assur'd the World, that heaven never lighted up any of those unusual candles (*Comets*) but upon an approaching night of misery to a State, by wars, or the death of Princes or plagues, &c. The Comet *An.* 1618. was followed with an *Iliad* of evils in *Germany* over which it seem'd more directly impendent. *Pliny* (speaking of Earth-quakes) proposeth it as of universal observation, *Nunquam Urbs Romana tremuit, &c.* Never did the City of *Rome* tremble by an earthquake, but events prov'd it a presage of great mischiefs to ensue.

To answer, 1. *This plea is very unsafe*; in regard it can hardly (like besieg'd men) open a gate to let in those it favours, but a great troop of enemies (to all sobriety) will croud in after. All the follies of observation of dreams, predictions by the stars, divination by inspection of beasts, Auguries, pretending to be the dictates of long experience, and of tradition handed to the World from the very first times thereof.

2. *This plea is very false*; for there have hapned many deaths of Princes never honour'd with the solemnity of any precedent *Comet*, or other object of wonder; and many Comets which never seem'd to blast the affairs of the world, by any envious and malignant aspect thereupon. Only when folly hath often shot its bolt and casually hit the mark (the event seeming to smile upon and commend its presages) there is a mighty notice taken thereof; and that,

1. *Because* (as 'tis well noted by the [d] Lord Bacon, *Natura intellectus humani, magis afficitur affirmativis & activis, quam negativis & privativis*: and accordingly where a rule or observation holds, or hits in some one, it makes a more lively impression then the failing thereof in a hundred instances; that which is (as he well observes) *omnis superstitionis*

[a] *Cometes antecessit exitus (Dionis fide) Claudii, Vitellii, Didii, Juliani, Severi, Macrini, quibus adde Car. 5. Matthiam & Annam Reginam M. Brit. Nunc. Prophet.* p. 22.

[b] *Hæc (auspicia, ostenta) veteres rerum magis eventis moniti, quam ratione docti probaverũt.* Tul. De Div. l. 1.

[c] *Quando fuit quod trium quatuorve annorum spatio, non Rex aliquis, Magnus Dux aut Princeps mortuus sit? Obiit M. Rex Philippus Impi. Ser. Hisp. Regina proles ejus Galliæ Rex. Seren. Maximil. à quo Cometa? nullus apparuit certe, si apparuisset, miser Cometa homicidiorum omnium reus fuisset* Fien. de Com. p. 39.

[d] De Augm. Scient. l. 5. c. 4.

superstitionis & vanæ credulitatis radix, the root of all superstition and vain credulity (in astrologie, Dreams, Omens, Prodigies, &c.) that which may derive some strength and credit from what [e] *Herodotus* tells us, viz. That there were more prodigies found out by the *Egyptians* (perhaps because of a traditional reverence of signs and wonders continu'd among them from the very times of *Moses* wherein so many happened) then by any other Nation whatsoever: and their usage was when any Prodigie hapned to write it down, and observe the event succeeding; and if ever any like Prodigie happned, they easily concluded it would be issu'd in a similar event. The mind of man is apt to be greatly mov'd and affected with objects which strike upon it strongly and unawares, and lead it into wonder and ecstacy; and easily invited to believe (especially because loath to be dodg'd and abus'd with endless dissimilitudes and diversities among things) that other things will fall like those few with which it is so strongly affected and prepossest.

2. *Because any great evils (like some harsher passages in Musick) use to make strong impressions on our memories*, and are generally made use of as a kind of little *Epochas*, whence we reckon our times. Whereas great blessings slide off from our minds, and are soon deliver'd to silence and forgetfulness: or else such prodigious accidents would soon appear (if at all) to *prophecy* as oft *smooth*, as harsh and *evil things* concerning us.

Thirdly. (*Nam pluribus exceptionibus uti, nemo prohibetur*) this plea is (at best) but very fallacious and uncertain; and that upon many accounts:

1. *As many and great evils have been consequent to Prodigies, so also are they to many and great evils*; the World is acquainted with any thing better then consistence; its nature seems emblem'd in its figure, it is round, and accordingly in perpetual motion and turning from one side (state and condition) to another. And therefore as the Disciples said to our Saviour (in that great croud, Luk. 8. 45.) when demanding who touch't Him? *Seest thou the multitude thronging thee, and sayst thou who toucheth me?* so say I, when we see such a multitude of changes and evils in the world, thronging of Prodigies before and after, shal wee be so vain, as to ask what persons death, or what event is touch't upon and pointed unto in their meaning and signification?

2. *This plea builds upon a most unfaithfull and sinking foundation*, viz. the credit of all those prodigious narrations which books and common discourse) are stuft out withall; which will shrink to a mean account, if we consider how prone a faith men have for such kind of relations as these, arising either from a vain opinion of themselves, (as if worthy for whose sake God should be continually altering of nature, and making of signs) or too high a conceit of men and the concerns of this life, [f] hence they conceive a great man cannot be born without some strange presage, nor fall without some sympathy appearing in the very creation. Besides, the minds of men finding themselves too great and large to be contentedly entertain'd with the dry and scanty contemplation of things little and vulgar,

[e] Τέρατά τε πλέω σφι [Αἰγυπτίοισι] ἐυρηται ἢ τοῖσι ἄλλοισι ἅπασι ἀνθρώποισι· γινομένου δὲ τέρεος τοῦ, φυλάσσουσι γράφοντες τὸ ἀποβαῖνον· καὶ ἢν τὰ ὅμοια ὑστέρῳ παραπλήσιον τούτῳ γένηται, καὶ τοῦτο νομίζουσι ἀποβήσεσθαι. Euterp. c. 82.

[f] *Undenam constat Cometas ad aliquid nobis significandum usurpari? an aliunde quam ex vanitate qua miseri turgescimus, dum digni nobis ipsis videmur, propter quos hæc ostenta fiant?* Gassend. Meteor. p. 1165.

vulgar, doe readily encourage the relations of things new and rare, and that have some touches and umbrages of more wonderfull and magnificent, then this [τὰ τῆς ἡμέρας] common scene of the World can present them with. Again some of these recorded Prodigies, were (in all likelihood) *Apologues* at first translated in time (by the easy multitude) into the repute of real histories. That, of a *Mare bringing forth a Hare*, recorded by *Herodotus*, as a Prodigie presaging (the overthrow of *Xerxes*, his great Army) was (no doubt) the defeat of that Army (appearing to the eye at first, in the strength and pride of a horse, but concluding in the fears and flight of a hare) related originally in a parable. As for the many prodigies related by Heathen Poets (*Lucan, Virgil*, as also *Ovid*) it shall suffice in this place, to return, that they are related by Heathen Poets: *By Heathen* whose misery it was (by the subtilty of the Devil and their Priests) to be abus'd with the faith of a great many vainly reputed or falsly reported prodigies; *By Poets* whose priviledge it is (without the reproach of a lye) ingenuously to abuse their Readers with the relation of things (apt to move wonder and raise affection) never acted but upon the stage of imagination.

Lib. 7. c. 57.

Virg. Georg. l. 1. sub. fin. Ovid. Met. l. 15. sub. fin.

3. *God may possibly* sometimes *in judgement, bring an evil upon men, (but falsly conceiv'd) presaged by a prodigie.* It is not unlikely, that the evils thought portended by prodigies are often consequent to them, because God will punish, as in some, a *superstitious credulity*, *and a timerous distrust* of his providence, so in others, a bold and blind neglect thereof, expresst in a scornfull rejection of any such suppos'd signs and intimations of a Divine displeasure (Providence often reacheth not its wings to such Persons as either neglect it by vain fears, or dare it by bold hopes.)

Excessus fiduciæ, res ut profana, ita semper infelix Verul. De Aug. Sci. l. 8.

That which may possibly pass with some for no rash example to abet this assertion is the instance of *Vespasians* death, of whom its recorded, that when notice was given him of a Comet, then appearing, as a presage of his death; He bad the Relaters to deliver this message to the King of *Parthia*, *Ille comatus, ego autem calvus*; meaning, that seeing that King wore long hair, it seem'd most probable, that this *stella crinita* (as the Romans call'd it) did portend his death rather then the Emperour *Vespasian* who was bald: But the Emperour dyed before the extinction of this Comet, and that King surviv'd both. Now though I incline not (with that Reverend Person) to attribute his sudden death to a disregard of this Prodigie as his summons to the divine tribunal, (for how could he possibly understand it to be such?) Yet to conclude this profane neglect of a matter (then suppos'd) religious and sacred, to have influenc'd his death, is I think neither to be uncharitable nor superstitious. [I question not the truth of at least some of those observations the Heathens made of a Divine *Nemesis*, often asserting the honour of Religion by avenging the neglect and scorn of their (though superstitious rites) upon principles of Atheism.] Otherwise, had that speech of the Emperour, been the issue of a duely inform'd judgment, it had been (for the matter) as allowable a sarcasm, as

D. *Jackson* Serm. on Luk. 13. 1.

Wisd. 14. 29, 30. Vid. Valer. Max. de Relig. neglect. c. 1. & de Prodig. c. 6.

as that herewith *Elijah* reprehended the Religion of the Image of *Baal*.

SECT. VI.

An Answer to the Objections proceeding upon the more immediate principles of Reason.

The first Objection, God must be suppos'd to warn before he strike; *Answered in four particulars, the Rational intimations of a judgement, what. Second Objection*, that the removal of this opinion of Prodigies, weakens the faith of a Divine Providence; *answered the Opinion evinc'd rather to invalidate the article. Third Objection*, It appears not to what end they can serve, but that of presages, *the danger of this objection noted, the alledging of this end prov'd vain by assigning more great and excellent ends.*

THe next Objections which expect our answer, proceed upon the more immediate principles of Reason: whereof the first is this, *It seems greatly to justle the notions of goodness and justice in God, to believe he warns not before he strikes*; now what warnings more proper and propoption'd to their end, then Prodigies, which speak to the senses, and so are most likely to make the duller multitude start and reflect? There are some [*καιροὶ ἐπισκοπῆς καὶ ἐκδικήσεως*] *times of visitation and vengeance*, times wherein the cup of vengeance is become brim-full, and ready to run over, when *Gods repentings are come to an end*, when his three worthies *Noah*, *Daniel*, and *Job*, should not prevail for the pardon or reprieve of a condemned Nation. Now then surely 'tis but reasonable to presume that infinite Goodness hath so provided that there should be some signs of such times, that the repentance of good men might, at least, break the fall of that *talent of lead*, which it cannot altogether prevent, surely an Earth-quake would now be a seasonable Monitour, and (like a shakeing before a burning fit) be a very significant fore-runner of some fiery indignation shortly to break forth.

Objection 1.

Luke 19.41.
Jer. 50.27.

I answer, 1. *Such warnings if given, would not work so kindly upon the ill-natur'd World, as it is presumed*; for some evil men, would like Vermine soon quit that house, that Nation of whose inddain ruines they had such sure presages: and others would fight against heaven the more desperately, as expecting no quarter from it; few would express the good spirit of *Josiah*, who though he knew that evil was determin'd upon *Hierusalem*, yet reform'd he with all his might.

Sol.

2 King. 22. 17.

2. *God often warns men by his* judicia leviora. The language of his lighter judgements, is, *Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.* He usually scrapes the infected house, before *one stone be not left upon another*, and makes the corrections of *his rods*, Monitours of his approaching *scorpions*,

3. *Shall any man teach God wisdom?* We have already the terrible

threatnings contained in Scripture, and (*aliena pericula*) the great examples of divine justice, there alway presented to our fear and caution: and they which regard not the thunder of Gods threatnings, would never be much moved with the squibs of a few Prodigies. None greater expectants of signs from heaven, then the Jews, but when God gave them and others, *fearfull sights and great signs from heaven*, none so stupidly regardless and inobservant.

Luk. 21. 11.

4. *There are other kinds of Prodigies, by which wise men may receive more certain notices of an approaching evil in a state.* As there is a *natural divination*, whereby the birds can presage an approaching storm and tempest; (that which gave birth to the opinion that they were *Divorum interpretes*) so there is an *artificial one*, appropriate to every art and mysterie almost. The *Physician* hath *prognostica mortis*, the *Naturall Philosopher* his presages of winds and seasons, the *Mariner of storms and calms*, the *Husbandman*, many of fruitfulness and plentie (elegantly described by the Poet): so also the prudent States-man hath his Prospective of many signs, by which he can spy a trouble and change in the state, as yet a great way off:

Virgil. Georg. l. 1.

-----Ille etiam cæcos instare tumultus
Sæpe monet, fraudesque & operta tumescere bella.

Such had that Politician, who upon a view of the manners of the city where he came, brake out, *O urbem venalem & citò perituram, si emptorem invenerit!*

Now the signs and Prodigies which thus forewarn him, are such as these; 1. *Monstra vitiorum & doctrinarum*, monsters of vices and opinions generally obtaining therein. When the old man is grown too big for the girdle of shame or fear, and the hand of publick justice neglects to rub off that rust, which is growing upon the iron Age, it may quickly be expected that God should do his own work himself, assert his own righteousness, by throwing it into the fire of some terrible judgement, to refine and purifie it. So also, such monstrous Doctrines as these grown bold and publick, are a presage of some great distempers growing upon the common Body; *That there are some inward and extraordinary calls to an Office, which owe an account of their truth and reality solely to that spirit which feels them. That onely Christ in Person is the lawfull and rightfull Governour of the Earth. That Magistracy stands not with Christian liberty. That*, Nullus est Dominus Civilis dum est in peccato mortali. *Where the Magistrate will not reform the Church, the people may.* Every such Doctrine as dull and wooden as it may seem, contains (like the *Trojane* horse) armed men in the belly of it.

Ezek. 22. 15.

2. *Extraordinary Eclipses of the superiour Luminaries*, (the Governours in Church and State) either as to the light of wisdom and counsel, or respect and reverence before the people. Before Gods petty day of judgement in a state, the *Sun usually is turned into darkness, and the Moon into bloud*; there is great contempt thrown upon the Person or Government of the Ruler, by libells and seditious speeches, and his chief Ministers are required as sacrifices to appease some popular fury and discontent.

Hos. 9. 7. Is. 19. 11. 24.

2. *Earth-*

3. *Earthquakes in divers places.* I mean, a great many commotions and petty tumults among the populacy. These argue high dissatisfactions. Such frequent breakings out in the body Politick, argue many noxious and dangerous humours therein, which (without the wise interpose of State-physitians) presage ruine to the whole. These and more signs (not proper for this place) are there, which are sufficient to the mind that hath wisdom; as for folly, it would not receive instruction, though *one arose from the dead.*

Secondly, We are further told, that by removing of the received Opinion of Prodigies and signs, we remove a main pillar, whereupon the faith of a Divine Providence [of a God, concern'd in all the affairs of the world] and that we hereby strengthen the hands of Atheism, and sew pillours under the elbows of secure and sleepy wickedness. Objection 2.

Answer. *Its rather the way to make men Atheists to tell them, these are Gods signs of things which they see seldom or never come to pass.* All arguments brought in defence of a truth men are willing to free their minds of, if they doe not fully prove, doe hugely weaken and disparage it; like weak Physick, which if it drive not forth the ill humour, doth by accident exasperate it, and make the patient worse: and therefore it is no way safe to trust so great and important an article of our faith, with so feeble and aery a proof as this is. If an Atheist can believe that the world came by chance into all this beauty and elegant order, and the severall spheares of beings to maintain so gratefull an harmony in their motions, without some great intelligence to give law and measure to them; He will more easily perswade himself, that things run by chance sometimes into discord, monstrousness, and deformity. Answer.

Thirdly, 'Tis further objected, that all the common and more familiar methods of action, appointed the creatures giving so excellent an account of themselves to a wise and considerate mind, it cannot readily be conceiv'd to what end any of these extraordinaries in Nature, can minister but to that of Divination of events future. Objection 3.

Though this be a most inconsequent and presumptuous reasoning, [*things must be for this end, for I know no other that they can serve*] yet, because where the mind of man reacheth not the true causes or proper ends of any thing, it is easily tempted to take up in such vain and cheap resolves as a superstitious multitude (or a guilty fear) may tender to it; and because most men are such *Gloriæ animalia* as (like *Proteus*) to shift into any odd shape and form of opinion and conceit to free themselves when held with the knot of any difficult and perplex *Phænomenon* layd before them. I shall therefore propose those higher and more excellent ends of these irregular accidents, which may satisfie mens minds, and (as a real diamond doth its counterfeit) most effectually detect and disparage that little and mean end which vulgar opinion makes them servants to [that of an unnecessary, and often hurtfull curiosity, in the knowledge of times reserv'd soley in Gods power and counsel.] *Sol.*

First, Then. They serve to awaken more gross and heavy minds into a sense of the Being, Providence, and greatness of God.

1. *Of his Being.* One account why Atheists live in a constant neglect and inobservance of the God of Nature, is this, [*All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*] the constant and even harmony which nature makes, lulls men into a dull and sleepy inadvertency; whereas some strangeness and discords now and then in the parts thereof (new and unwonted occurrences) are apt to awaken their dull and sleepy minds into a sense of some mighty power which runs through the world and commands the forces of Nature which way he pleaseth.

2 Pet. 3.

Since we lost the favour of God we are greatly propense to loose the sense of Him: for if he observe a constant method in *the works of Creation*, the God of nature shall be lost and forgotten in the power of Nature: if, as in the *works of Providence*, He proceeds by no rul'd cases, (never prescribe to himself) then he shall be eclyps'd in chance and fortune: and therefore perhaps sometimes He acts so accountably, and consonantly to our notions, in the works of *his providence*, that men are forc'd to say, *Verily there is a God which judgeth in the Earth*: and sometimes so irregularly in the works of Nature that men are forc'd to cry out, *The Finger of God!* Were the works in Nature, alway layd out by the line of an even, and (every way) immutable law and order, men would be apt to think (though they could not make sense of that thought) that all was done by Nature; and should Monsters, Comets, Earthquakes, &c. turn quotidian, men would be tempted to conclude the world a great lottery, and all effects owing *soli fortuito Causarum concursui*. Whereas a wise intermixture of some irregularities puts men upon reflection, and gives them to understand that Natures ill shap'd letters at one time, are an assurance that she could not write so fairly and evenly as generally, had she not some Great Master to guide her hand, and bind in the powers of some causes apt to exorbitate and flie out.

Ps. 58. 11.

2. *Of his Providence.* Should not Rivers sometimes stand, and springs fayl, men would not be so fully assur'd, that it is *God who sendeth the springs into the vallies, that it is he who watereth the Hills*. Should there not happen some terrible *Vulcanos*, and fiery eruptions, we should not awaken into a sense of that mighty Power, which keeps all that natural tinder in the bowels of the earth from catching fire before its appointed time: Did there not new springs break forth sometimes, from the usually driest breasts of our common Mother [deserts and wildernesses] we could not with the Psalmist, adore the power of God discover'd *in turning the Wilderness into a standing water, and dry grounds into water springs*. Besides the exorbitances of Natural causes at sometimes, and their running (like unruly horses) out of that way (those lines which common Nature hath prescrib'd them) resolve us that their general stillness and order is owing to Him who *rideth upon the Heavens*, whose Wisdom and power moderates all their blind and impetuous forces: A truth, which the ancients couch't in their fable of the Gyant *Typhon* (which signifies swelling out)

Ps. 104. 10.

Ps. 107. 35.

Ps. 68. 4.

Verul. Sap. Vet. fab. 6.

out) bidding battel to (their most ancient Deity) Fate, or Nature, but bound up and restrain'd by him in Nets (as it were) of Adamant.

3. *Of his admirable greatness.* Upon the occurrence of any matters strange and extraordinary, Nature hath taught us to cast up our eyes and hands to heaven, in a kind of tacit acknowledgement that matters rare and wonderfull owe themselves to Him who is Θαυμασιουργός, the great Wonder Worker, who is accordingly to be acknowledg'd in them all. And therefore though we fear not a Comet or an Earthquake, yet may we thence take occasion to quicken our selves to a Reverence and fear of that greatness which appointed them. The true spirit of Religion will not receive *Metum*, a fear of distrust, though the *Earth remove, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea*; but yet readily entertains *timorem*, a fear of reverence, when it perceives the earth to be but shaken, (by an Earthquake) or the Mountains to break forth into a flame. As we must not loose our Philosophy in Religion, by a total neglect of second causes, and turning Superstitious; so neither must we loose our Religion in Philosophy, by dwelling on second causes, till we quite forget the *First*, and become profane. To cure Superstition by profaneness, is to burn an Idol with fire taken from the Altar.

Secondly, *Some of these petty alterations in Nature, serve as a kind of types, Essays, Assurances of that Greater and more universal alteration thereof, at the consummation of the world.* That we might not distrust a Resurrection, God hath vouchsafe us (as *Theodoret* notes) καὶ τὰ ἐν φυτοῖς μιμήματα τῆς ἀναστάσεως, many pretty imitations and natural Sermons thereof, *as the rising again of decay'd plants from their roots in the spring, the return of herbs and trees from their dying seeds into life again.* Thus the frightfull eruptions of fire from the earth, wonderfully eclipses of the lights of heaven, the strange fires sometimes discovered in the air, the mighty tremblings of the earth, may serve (like *Hierusalem* pourtra'd by the Prophet upon a tile) as little maps and imitations of that more dreadfull confusion which shall cover the whole face of Nature at the last day, and as a kind of *præludia* to that time when the *Sun* shall be cloth'd with *darkness, the heavens shall be on fire, the elements shall melt with fervent heat*, and *the Earth with all the works therein shall be burnt up.* De Provid. Orat. 9.

Cæcilius the Heathen derided the Christian doctrine of a final dissolution of the works of Nature at the last day, with his *quasi Naturæ divinis legibus constitutus ordo æternus turbetur*, as if ever the perpetual order of Nature which hath received its seal and sanction from the counsels of heaven, can ever be ruffled and disturb'd: Now these strange alterations in nature, are but prefaces to much stranger; and the breakings forth of mighty fires but of the earth sometimes give assurance that (*like Uriah*) it carries its own fate about it, such fiery materials, as will quickly reduce it to a condition beneath its first *Chaos*, in that day of vengeance wherein God will *destroy the murderers* and abusers of his servants, and *burn up their* polluted *city*. *Minut. Fel.*

Thirdly, *God in them supplies the soul with such objects as He make it most*

Longin. Περὶ ὕψ. §. 32. Id. §. 31.

most apt to contemplate and admire. In a work of *Art* (as *Longinus* observes) man admires the curiosity and accurateness; in a work of *Nature*, the vastness and magnificence thereof: because in the former, He looks for but ἀρχέτυπα ἀνθρώπου, somewhat like man (the measure & subject of art) but in the latter, somewhat worthy of God: and further that if any thing occurre which is μεγέθους, ὕψος, καὶ τὸ πολὺ κρεῖττον ἡμῶν, strange, vast, and (in comparison with our selves) bigg with a kind of Divinity, ψυχὴ πᾶσα ἐπαίρεται, we are carried with a kind of native instinct, to consider and attend unto it: and he instances accordingly in the eclipses of heaven, the vast ocean, the *vulcanos* of *Ætna*; as objects which command the mind to wonder and ecstacy. [The Soul hereby gives silent testimony to it self, that it was made to contemplate and admire that God, with whom all the first exemplars of greatness, power, glory, beauty, dwell together, or whatsoever there is in the works of *Art* or *Nature*, in which there appear any rude touches and shadows of wonderfull and admirable.]

Now then as there are in Nature (the Art of God) those admirable curiosities, appearing in the elegant fabrick of the creatures, the mysterious anatomy of parts, and those more subtile and cryptick ways which Nature walks in, toward her designed ends, which affect not the duller and more heedless part of the world, but supply the sons of Art with fresh and repeated wonders; so in these prodigious instances, the ruder sort of men (which carry their Souls in their eys) find somewhat to engage them to contemplate and admire. These works goe off from the common figures and measures of Nature, are great and vehement; and therefore, proper objects to call forth the soul into contemplation and admiration; which whilst it stands thus at gaze doth tacitly and interpretatively venerate that God who in all these strange Events, appears *wonderfull in counsel and mighty in working.*

In Fragm. Metaph.

Fourthly, *Many of these Errata (in the book of the Creature)* lead us to an understanding of the evil of sin which hath made the creatures thus *subject to vanity* and miscarriage. *Theophrastus* hath noted that in the matter whereof natural things consist, there is πολὺ τὸ ἄτακτον καὶ ἀπειθὲς καὶ δυσχείριστον αὐτῆς, much of it which is unwieldly, too stiffe and stubborn to be turned to the seal of Nature, to receive those signatures and impresses, which are best, and primarily intended to be stampt upon it. A defect which escapt not the notices of many contemplative Heathens, who could not resolve themselves of the proper cause thereof [Divine malediction lay upon the creatures for the sin of man.]

Fifthly, *They serve to lead us into a more distinct knowledge of the works of Nature.* Nature is the best Interpreter of it self; now (like tortur'd men) she then discovers her secrets, either when vex'd by Art in lesser bodies, or disturb'd by accident in greater: Comets, new Stars, monstrous Eclipses, Earth-quakes, Meteors, &c. all serve the knowledge of one mystery in Nature or other. The knowledge of Nature is greatly absolv'd, by our understanding [*Quid fieri potest, & Quomodo*] what can be done therein, and how it is done: the former

former knowledge we advance to especially by an attendance to *Natura libera, vel victa*, Nature in its constant and more easy freedom of Operation, or as demeaning it self, under the constraints of Art. The latter knowledge we fairly arrive at by a regard to *Natura Devians*, Nature erring and running out of her more common road, because the Errours of Nature correct those *Idols* which the soul is easily abus'd with all, while attending solely to things common and usual, (whence it is apt to take up its maximes) and also because these are sometimes a kind of rude and imperfect pieces in Nature, and so serve (like a ship halfe built) to discover her *silent processes*, and more cryptick methods in the building up and compleating of her works.

And therefore if we had a more faithfull *History* of the *Anomals in Nature*, (the want whereof is owing not a little to the superstition of men, which stains all it toucheth) we might be soon able to see beyond the surface of those things, which as yet seem plac'd in the world, but to confound and pose us. But the evil is, that as the *History of Times*, is usually drawn up, so as it may minister not to truth but faction; the *History of Nature* so as to gratifie either interest or curiosity, so the *History of Præternatural occurrences*, as it may serve, wonder or superstition; not in so judicious and faithfull a relation of the critical circumstances of accidents, as to make a square *basis* whereupon to erect the steady principles of Philosophy.

Sixthly, *Such unwonted occurrences give us to understand that the most common rules of natural operation are not without exception, nor her most known laws simply immutable*; God is able to overthrow Nature by it self, by appointing one Natural cause to disturb and countermand the weaker efforts of another. He can cause that τροχὸν τῆς γενέσεως (in S. *Jams*'s phrase) *wheele of Nature* to fire and destroy it self, by delivering it to the violent and disorderly motion of its several parts. Jams 3. 6.

All the creatures are at God's foot, all their Orders and motions, but the laws which his infinite wisdom appointed them unto. Accordingly S. *Austin* speaking of the forementiond prodigious *Phasis* of the *Planet Venus*, tell us, God would have men thence learn, *Se Deo non debere præscribere*, that they ought not to prescribe to God; and that he is able, *Naturam in longè aliud quam nobis cognitum est vertere & mutare*, command Nature into a quite different order and posture from what our shorter thoughts can reach unto; and, that *Voluntas Conditoris conditæ rei cujusque natura est*, the nature of every thing is but the present will of its maker. As all arbitrary and contingent Agents and events, seem in a sort necessary, with respect to the knowledge of God; so all agents (as to us) necessary, are mutable and arbitrary, consider'd with respect to the power of God. All the creatures are but so many earthen vessels, bearing upon them the arbitrary figures and impressions of their mighty Former. Lib. 1. De Civit. D. c. 8.

Seventhly, Tis usually added, that *all these exorbitances in Nature, serve to fayle and set off the general beauty and elegancy of its works.* All that ὕλην ἀκόσμητον ἐοῦσαν (in the language of *Plotinus*) matter not fully subdued and layd hold upon by Form, doth but enhance the

value of all those comely proportions elsewhere discovered in the Creation.

These great ends (and greater no doubt are some of those which lie hidden in the recesses of the Divine Mind) offering so fair and easy an account of these irregular accidents (if at least we may so term events falling out by as necessary, though less known and common a rule and law of Nature, as its daily labours) to receive them, (without any *Interpreter* to explain their language) as a kind of Divine messengers to bring us news from Heaven, and (as the *Angel* to *Daniel*) to make us *Understand what shall befall our people hereafter*, is to weary our selves to catch a shadow, and like *Adonis* to fall in love onely with the reflections of our own face, phancy, and abus'd imagination, and to be vain without any Apology in the world.

SECT. VII.

An Answer to the several Scriptures alledged in favour of the adverse Opinion.

The first Scripture Mat. 16. 3. *speaking of* signs of times, *answer'd by shewing the great disparity of* signs, things signified, the times spoken of, *and* the Persons *spoken to, from those concern'd in this Argument. The second Scripture* [Joel 2. 30, 31.] *Vindicated. The* day of the Lord *how understood in Scripture, mighty changes in the creation, in prophetical Scriptures, to be understood mystically, and why. The Prophecy of* Joel, *how understood, and when accomplished. The third Scripture.* [Luk. 21. 11.] *answered largely.*

HAving thus driven this Opinion from all its little holds, it remains now that we beat it from its *Fort Royal* [*the Authority of Sacred Scripture, which seeems to speak favour for it*] Now the first place of Scripture, I take notice of, prest to the service thereof, is that speech of our Saviour,

Mat. 16. 3.

Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; and can ye not discern the signs of the times?

In which words our Saviour intimates, that as God in the works of *Nature*, hath consulted the conveniencies of *common life*, by appointing some certain *signs* of the seasons ensuing, so hath he also in his *providence* assisted the happiness and advantage of our civil and *Spiritual life*, by ordaining some *signs of the times*, whence we may be able to make a *Crisis* of the issue of things: and that it is a great instance of folly in men, that they are such able Interpreters of the various lines in the face of heaven, but very uncapable, and stupidly inobservant of those rational signs and intimations of the state and condition of the present or future times of the Church. Now then what signs of times can more plausibly and rationally be assigned then

then prodigies, which the heavieſt men can obſerve, and the wiſeſt cannot readily define to what end ſome of them (Comets eſpecially and New ſtars) can ſerve, unleſs to point out to the world a difference of times?

I anſwer Scripture (like over preſt grapes) gives a very ungrateſull taſt and ſenſe, when preſt beyond its eaſy and native intent and purpoſe; that ſo the preſent Text is, will appear, if theſe four particulars be duly attended unto.

Firſt, The great *diſparity of ſigns*; the ſigns whereof the Text is underſtood, were,

1. *Signa moralia*, ſigns of a moral Nature, ſuch as were the gradual leſſening of the luſtre and glory of the Jewiſh Polity and pedagogy; by the ceaſing of prophecy, the abſence of the heavenly fire, the arke of the Covenant, the *Shechinah*, the Oracles by *Urim and Thummim*, from the ſecond Temple; the lapſing of the government from Kings to Dukes, from Dukes to the *Sanhedrin*, from them to the Romanes; there having been no Kings types of Chriſt after *David* and *Solomon*, (except *Hezekiah* be admitted a candidate for that honour) This vaniſhing ſplendour of the face of Moſes (that Oeconomy whereof he was the miniſter) was a ſign that the *Sun of Righteouſneſs* was now a riſing, under whom a ſtate of more ſpiritual and inward glory was ſhortly to obtain.

2. *Signa prædicta*, *ſigns of times* long before ſpoken of, and of ſacred and ſcriptural inſtitution; ſuch as were, the *departing* (in a good degree at leaſt) *of the Sceptre from Judah*, the near expireing of *Daniels weeks*, the coming of *John the Baptiſt in the Spirit of Elias*, the general expectation of the *Meſſias* about that time rais'd up in the minds of men.

3. *Signa miraculoſa*, the mighty ſigns and wonders (every way equal to thoſe upon which the credit of the Moſaical diſpenſation was built) which attended the perſon and doctrine of our Saviour, Jo. 10. 25. and to which (as his viſible witneſſes) he ſometimes made his Mat. 11. 5. appeal.

Whereas the *ſigns of times*, I contend againſt, are neither of any moral nature, (ſpeaking not to the Reaſon, but the phancy of men) neither were they ever foretold, (God doth not now appear ſo far to value the world as to uſher any change in the affairs thereof, by the promiſes of a Prodigie) nor are they miraculous, the power of Nature (in ſuch a coincidence of cauſes) being able to reach the production of any of theſe prodigious ſigns.

2. *The diſparity of things ſignified*; All the forementioned ſigns were *tokens for good*, but as the bluſhings of the Evening before the dawning of that happy day, wherein, a ſtate big and good enough for the title of the *Kingdom of Heaven*, was to take place. Beſides, they were matters of no narrow and private reference (the fall of ſome Great Perſon, or the commencing of ſome petty War) but of a catholick concern, ſuch wherein the felicities of Jew and Gentile were bound up, (matters big enough for the ſolemnity of a ſign to preface and bring on. The things ſignified were alſo matters of

huge importance [as, that *Jesus* was the promised Messiah, that all the shadows, and rites of the law, were to expire and conclude (like the *Phœnix* in a nest of spices) in the graces, truths and glories of the Gospel-state; that the *wall of partition* was now to be taken away, and all Nations to own themselves brethren under one common Father] These things, all men were concern'd to know and believe, and therefore God taught them by great signs, as well as excellent Preachers. Whereas Prodigies are suppos'd the signs of wrath and judgements, which yet often surprize men (not unfitly therefore stil'd *Gods arrows*, which give a fatal, but withall a suddain and a silent wound) and besides are presum'd to come forth to serve some worldly and little ends and interests, which men easily perswade themselves, Heaven hath espoused with as much passion as themselves.

Ps. 144. 6.

3. The *disparity of the times spoken of* (in that Text) from our own: The times there intended, were times rather present then future; times wherein the Mosaical Oeconomy, (brought on with mighty signs and wonders) was to determine; Times wherein the Church was to be put under an immutable and excellent form of administration (stil'd therefore the *last times* in Scripture) Now necessary it was that some remarkeable signs of those times should be given forth in scripture, that so the age wherein that mighty change should fall, might the better acquiesce therein, and succeeding generations might have the more secure a faith of the exhibition of the true *Messias*, because observing all the *signs of the times* to which he was promised, exactly conspiring in those wherein he was exhibited. Whereas all the changes which chequer and vary the times of the World now, are of no name and reckoning, if compar'd with this. The world is so acquainted with civil changes, that I should expect a Prodigie rather to give notice of some days of peace and settled tranquillity (to which the world is the greatest stranger)

4. The *Disparity between the Persons to whom those words were spoken, and our selves*; The Jews were a People so us'd to signs, that the *Apostle* tells us, 1 Cor. 1. 22. *the Jews require a sign.* And it was the vulgar opinion amongst them, that as all extraordinary Prophets were to seal their commission with a miracle, so all events extraordinary were to be foreshewn by a sign. Hence the Jews come to our Saviour with that bold demand, *What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest all these things?* Jo. 2. 18. and the Disciples (upon the credit of this common conceit) no sooner hear our Saviour foretell strange events in reference to *Hierusalem*, and the Temple, but they presently ask him [*what shall be the sign, when all these things shall come to pass?*] God perhaps gave them signs, to assure them that the evils which befell them arose not out of the dust, but came upon them from the fore-appointing counsels of heaven; and to awaken their dull and worldly minds into a lively sense of his justice and providence. But now in the broad day light of the Gospel, 'tis expected that we should not need awakening by any such monitors into a sense and awe of the Divine Majesty. We must now believe without a

Mar. 8. 11.

Mat. 13. 4.

sign,

sign, and derive our repentance not from mighty Earthquakes and prodigies, but an ingenious and understanding sense of sin.

I suppose now that the light of what hath been said upon this Text of Scripture, is sufficient to chase away all shadow of any argument from it, to abet any such *signs of times* as our adversaries plead it in favour of. And what though we should be forc'd to return a *Non liquet* in reference to the true ends of Comets and new stars sometimes discovered to the World? must we therefore conclude them but a sort of more glorious impertinencies in Nature, unless they serve our curiosity, by being made *signs of times*? Is it such news to hear so short a creature as man is, past his depth? We find the Almighty poseing of Job, almost through every science; In Geometry, *Knowest thou the ballancings? of the clouds? whereupon are the foundations of the Earth fasten'd? or who hath laid the corner stone?* In Natural Philosophy, *Hast thou entred into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the deep? hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?* In Opticks, *Where is the way where light dwelleth, and as for darkness, where is the place thereof? by what way is the light parted, which scattereth the East-wind upon the earth?* In Astronomy, *canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season, or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Knowest thou the Ordinances of heaven, canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?* In Arithmetick, *who can number the clouds in wisdom?* In Natural History, *knowest thou the time, when the wild goats of the rock bring forth*, &c. God will have some things in Nature unsearchable, *to hide pride from man*, and to discover himself to him: for it must needs be presumed that all these mysteries came forth from, and are comprehended by some First Mind, and mighty Wisdom.

Ch. 37. 16. 38. 4. vers. 16. & 22. v. 14. & 24. v. 32. 33. Ch. 39. 1.

We are urg'd next with the words of the Prophet *Joel*. chap. 2. 30, 31. So chap. 3. 13.

I will shew wonders in the heavens, and in the Earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoak;

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord is near, the Sun and the Moon shall be darkned, and the Stars shall withdraw their shining: From which words those Act. 2. 19, 20. are borrowed.

To which may be added because of a likeness of expression that place. *Luk.* 21. 25, 26.

And there shall be signs in the Sun and in the Moon, upon Earth distress of Nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring.

Mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the Earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

In which former scripture, by the *Day of the Lord*, we are to understand some special day of vengeance; it being usual in sacred Writ, (as some of the Hebrew Doctours observe) to intitle days eminent for any unusual expressions of Divine favour or displeasure, *Days of the Lord*: whereas we find this day prefac'd and foretold by such prodigious occurrences as easily resolve themselves into causes natural. Revel. 16. 14.

I answer, First Learned expositors generally understand those places not in any literal sense, but receive them all as so many prophetical schemes of speech, (instances whereof, are of most familiar occurrence in the Prophets) expressive of some wonderfull evils shortly to afflict the world: as they do also (on the contrary) the promises of *a new heaven and a new earth*, the increase *of the light of the sun and of the moon*, &c. but as so many figurative expressions of some white and gladsom days shortly to succeed. Particularly the learned * *Grotius* is so secure of a figurative sense of such places, that he tells us, they are never to be expounded (in all scripture) to any other. And indeed should we expound them literally, we should soon honour the falls of great men, or destruction of cities, with greater (or as great) wonders, as attended the crucifixion of our blessed Saviour. Besides, what Histories ever mention any such astonishing alterations in the frame of Nature, as the literal sense of these places would introduce a faith of?

Jer. 4. 23. Ezek. 32. 7, 8. Joel. 2. 10. Isai. 13. 10. 34. 4. Ezek. 30. 18. Rev. 6. 12. 8. 12. Isai. 24. 19, 20.

* *Locutiones istæ de caligine solis & lunæ multis in locis reperiuntur, nusquam autem sensu physico sed sensu figurato.* In Mat. c. 24. com. 27.

Now the Prophets chose thus to deliver themselves, for some or all of these Reasons;

1. Because it was the custom of the Eastern Nations, to describe great and mighty storms and troubles in a state, in such phrases as these, *the darkning of the heavens, falling of the stars, shaking of the earth, flying away of the Mountains, &c.*

2. Because these being the most remarkable and glorious bodies in the world, terrible alterations in them, seem the most proper representatives of mighty changes and alterations in kingdoms.

3. Because the terrible judgements of God upon the *Babylonians, Egyptians, Jews and obstinate Gentiles* (set forth in such expressions) were but *supremi judicii specimina*, little images and types of the last and dreadfull judgement; and therefore not unfitly character'd by the terrours and horrours which shall usher that last and great Day.

4. Because these are expressions mighty and vehement, and so very expressive of, and sutable unto, that hot and vigorous impression which the Spirit of Prophecy made upon the minds and imaginations of those holy men which were acted by it.

5. Because that anxiety and perplexity of mind, which should attend the plagues coming on men, should be as great almost, as if they saw the eye of heaven (*the sun*) put out, and the earth to tremble under them, &c.

Now, (in this figurative sense) the words were accomplished in their first and original intention, when that great misery was brought upon the earth by *Nabuchodonosor*; and they receiv'd a further degree of accomplishment (as S. *Peter* intimates, *Act.* 2. 19.) under the Romanes, when the land which was but *shaven before by Gods hired Razor*, had an utter *baldness* brought upon it (to use the expression of the Prophet.) and it shall have its fulfilling in the outmost latitude of its sense, at the day of judgment (of which some Interpreters solely understand it) Propecies have their *Gradus & Scalus complementi*, (as the Lord *Bacon* speaks) the last day only is that true πλήρωμα τῦ χρόνω

Is. 7. 20. Jer. 47. 5.

fulness of time, wherein they shall be completely fulfilled. God often draws similar and parallel lines of confusion, over different times and places, whips many stubborn children with the same rod, and therefore prophesies of the same vengeance may have their repeated accomplishments.

Secondly, Some learned men understand in these places a real and literal darkning of these great bodies of light, though arising not from any common and natural, but an extraordinary and supernatural cause. The reasons of which exposition, I shall remit to their proper place, which (if they appear satisfactory) nothing can be thence concluded in favour of presages by these Prodigies, which are but some more unusual effects lying hid in the powers of natural Agents, and sometimes exerting themselves.

There is one place of Scripture more which may seem to some to *require* (perhaps to refuse) an answer, *viz.* that Luke 21. 11. where our Blessed Saviour (foretelling that large line of confusion to be stretched out upon the Holy City, and whole nation of the Jews, as as a precedent signe thereof, tells his Disciples, *Great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences*, &c. now *earthquakes* have been numbred with Prodigies natural.

I answer, First, *When God hath once sealed them by his sanction and institution, Prodigies natural may be regarded as the signs of events arbitrary and supernatural.* Gods bow (without a string) in the heavens, is to us a signe that the world need never fear perishing by any such fatal arrow as once was shot out of the clouds, [A universal deluge] although it be owing to a natural and necessary cause; as being [by Gods institution] advanc'd to the dignity of a signe of grace and favour. Thus when God had told the people that, as an expression of his great displeasure against them for asking of a king, He would send thunder and rain (things in themselves natural, except it be said that the peculiar condition of that season and climate, made them approach to a miracle) it was a religious fear with which the people entertain'd their coming. God may appoint the crowing of a cock (at such an instant of time) to be one of his signs. So, when the Disciples had asked a signe of their Lord, when all his predictions concerning the Temple and Nation, should come to pass, and he had mentioned (amongst others) *Great earthquakes*, they were then prefer'd a kinde of Sacraments and prophetick symbols of the terrible shaking of the Jewish worship and polity now approaching. And indeed when the great wickedness and security of that generation had merited, that that fatal time should fall as a *snare upon all them that then dwelt on the earth*: such signs as had a natural cause seemed the most proper indications thereof, as which (because happening at that time) might sufficiently warn and alarm the Christians, and lull faster asleep the more Atheistical and incredulous part of that age; appearing to them, but the more unusual works of interrupted nature. To conclude now, that because some earthquakes, of Gods appointing, were his signs, therefore all are, is as inconsequent an inference as this; the bread and wine are signs and seals in

1 Sam. 12.

Luke 21. 7.

the

the Sacrament, becauſe ſtampt with a divine inſtitution; therefore all bread and wine may challenge the ſame degree of reverence and regard from us.

Secondly, Theſe earthquakes had ſuch characters upon them as might ſufficiently incloſe and diſtinguiſh them from the common iſſues of diſturbed nature; As,

Amos 1. 1. 1 King. 19. 11. 1. *Their greatneſs*, the Text ſtyles them *great earthquakes*. It is likely there appeared in them more then the bare force and impatience of ſome crude and impriſoned vapours. We read of an earthquake in the days of *Uzziah*, ſo great and terrible, that we finde it made an *Epocha* in the Jewiſh Antiquities. *Joſephus* reports that ſome furlongs of the mountains about *Jeruſalem* were rent aſunder, and cities ſwallowed up by it. If *Ariſtotle* ſtyled the *Celtæ μανιοδεῖς*, mad men, becauſe an earthquake would ſooner make a mountain tremble then them: certainly the title is too little for thoſe which are not impreſſive to ſome fear of God, when they ſee him thus let looſe the powers and forces of natural agents upon them.

2. Their *multitude* [there were *earthquakes in divers places*] Nature ran often againſt her bias in the ſame inſtances, that ſo the effect might not be intituled to the rub of ſome caſual impediment, but to the hand of heaven over-ruling and directing it. And ſhould I here grant (which I ſee no reaſon to do) that many and great earthquakes in a continent eſpecially, are a ſigne of ſome approaching evil, our adverſaries could advance little upon the conceſſion, both becauſe the example will I believe be found a heteroclite, and to ſtand alone in the Hiſtory of Nature, as alſo becauſe I conceive they would not adventure to compare a monſter or fiery meteor with the terrours of ſo many earthquakes (generally ſingled out in Scripture, as the monitours of the Divine power and majeſty)

3. Their *diſmal attendants*. The creatures would not nouriſh ſuch rebels againſt heaven as were then upon earth. [there were *famines*] the air refuſed to cheriſh and refreſh them. [there were *peſtilences*] the eyes of heaven ſhrunk away from ſuch hated objects [*the lights of heaven were darkned*] the earth groaned and ſtaggered in a ſort, under her vile burden [there were *earthquakes in divers places*] ſo that theſe ſigns might, as letters do, ſpeak that to a pious fear, in conjunction, which they could not have done in ſeparation.

1 Sam. 10. 3. 7. 4. Their *Divine prediction*. [There *ſhall be* earthquakes] and each earthquake was a ſigne, not as *Eventus mirabilis*, but as *Eventus prædictus*. Saul his meeting of *three men, carrying three kids, and three loaves, and a bottle of wine*, when he parted from *Samuel*, might have been received with the ſlight and paſſing notices of a caſual and common accident, had it not been foretold by the Prophet, as a ſigne of Gods preſence with him. And thus any of theſe earthquakes might perhaps have been received but with the common wonder which any rare and prodigious occurrence calls forth; but becauſe foretold, it was a ſigne when it came to paſs, that that eye of preſcience which could foreſee an event which held of no certain cauſe, did with as much truth and certainty foreſee that fearfull deſolation approaching,

ing, whereof it was appointed a signe and symbol. So that this place of Scripture appears to lend as little strength and support to that weak and falling cause, which seeks for confidence and assistance from it, as the foregoing.

From what hath been hitherto spoken concerning Prodigies Natural, it may appear that (howsoever they may possibly serve as a pretty ground for the fancy of a Poet or Oratour, which are to apply themselves to that part of the soul, which doth *parùm sapere*) they are too sandy and sinking a foundation to build any religious conclusions upon: we must not introduce *scenam in vitam, nec fabulas in fidem.* Pious frauds are a kinde of *feet of clay*, which will at last deceive and sink under that weighty body of religion, which ever relies upon them for support.

CHAP. III.

Concerning Prodigies Preternatural.

Prodigies Preternatural, what. The observation of them, proved a hurtfull vanity: The prosane opinion the Heathen had of God, upon the presence of any of them, noted from their writings. The evil influence they have upon the minds of men now: A double account given of the prevalence of this perswasion. The conceit of Gods giving forth some shadows and pictures of his great works before he set about them, toucht upon. The Authours judgement of Apparitions delivered in five Conclusions. An enquiry into the truth of the Prodigies mentioned in Josephus. *The wonderfull Prodigies mentioned in* Ovid *and the* Sibylline *Oracles, whence taken.*

ALl the Extraordinaries in the world which fall out by no steady and certain rules and causes (Such as are the approach of a *strange and unknown kinde of fish to the shore, the firing of houses by lightning, disorderly ebbs and flows of the sea, some spots as it were of bloud appearing in stones or statues*, and a hundred such like) to serve as I can the distinctness of the Discourse I style *Prodigies Preternatural.* All which as soon as fastning upon my hand, I shall shake off (as the *Apostle* did the venemous beast) and deliver the observation of them to that smoke and darkness, whence it did at first proceed, that my Reader nor my self derive no infection from so hurtfull and headless a vanity.

1. I style the observation of such things a *very hurtfull vanity.* The regarding of these and the like occurrences as presages of evil, served heretofore, but to cherish in men, this deformed thought of God, that (all things being subject to the law of an insuperable Fate and a blinde necessity) all he could do, was onely to foresee an evil, and so, to piece out his power with his courtesie, by these and the like accidents, to awaken men to shift for themselves, and as they could, to get out of the way, or to strengthen themselves by resolution when

any blinde and fatal cauſes were ready to ruſh furiouſly upon them. A matter which may appear from the words of *Ovid*, where (ſpeaking of *Venus*) he thus delivers himſelf,

Ovid. Metam. l. 15.

Verba jacit, Superósque movet, qui rumpere quanquam
Ferrea non poſſunt veterum decreta Sororum,
Signa tamen luctûs dant haud incerta futuri.
Arma ferunt inter, &c.

And to a like purpoſe *Silius Italicus*, in thoſe words,

Heu vani monitus, fruſtráque morantia Parcas
Prodigia! heu Superi fatis certâſſe minones!

Now Poets, (though in a matter of Hiſtory they uſually follow *ingenium proprium*, and ſtretch out by the force of imagination a matter which ſhrinks of it ſelf to a ſhort and ſimple narration, yet) in a matter of opinion commonly follow *ingenium temporum*, and take liberty to expreſs freely the common thoughts of the times wherein they live. That this was one of thoſe groſs phantaſms which abuſed the minds of men, in the darkneſs of Gentiliſm, may appear more fully from the words of a more ſevere and ſerious Writer, *Valerius Maximus*, who having told us of the ſeveral ſtrange Prodigies, as the finger of God held up to warn *Pompey* (before his encounter with *Ceſar*) or to declare his fall; He infers from them, that the Deity evidenced [*Se Pompeii errorem inhibere voluiſſe,*] a great willingneſs to have prevented the errour and raſhneſs of *Pompey*, but onely the inſuperable laws of Fate would not permit him (though otherwiſe a perſon ſober and adviſed enough) to weigh all thoſe forewarnings in the balances of counſel and conſideration.

Invicta leges neceſſitatis, pectus alioqui ab amentia remotum, Prodigia iſta juſtâ æſtimatione perpendere paſſæ non ſunt.

And if the Opinion concerning preſages by ſuch or the like occurrences, do not now comfort and aber any ſuch baſe perſwaſions concerning God, in ſome minds, it is well: ſure I am, if they do not give men to think that God is under the power of Fate, yet they little leſs then aſſure that Events are: For either the intimations by ſuch kinde of ſigns are (as the ſhadows of the mountains) ineffectual, moveable, and vain; and then, why do men at all regard them? or they are certain and undoubted; and if ſo, they place the Event beyond the redreſs of counſel and endeavour, and they call upon men onely *fortiter ferre*, to ride out the tempeſt approaching with as much courage and reſolution as they can. (the evils, both to the ſtate and religion, in the womb of which opinion, ſwell ſo viſibly out, that it is needleſs, by any further argument, to rip it up and lay them forth to common view and notice.)

Beſides, the Opinion greatly tends to leſſen and degrade the Majeſty of Heaven in our thoughts, while it prefers any ſuch weak and pitifull occaſions to the repute of Gods trumpets to give notice that he is now going forth to ſome great act of juſtice upon the world: it aims alſo directly to a leſſening of our faith of the Divine Goodneſs and Kindneſs, while it teacheth us to imagine we diſcover a *Fury* in every ſtrange iſſue of Providence: and to conclude it is mercy rather which is Gods ſtrange work (the black enſigns of wrath and vengeance being continually hung out in one unuſual accident or other)

other) it tends also to leaven the minds of men with sowre thoughts of Providence, as if designed to bereave men, not onely of happiness but the hopes and shadows thereof, and (as *Benjamin* did his mother) first to pain and torture them by mighty fears, and then to kill them by some great evil.

—— Sis cæca futuri
Mens hominum fati, liceat sperare timenti.

Finally, the Opinion doth make even good men too much to concern themselves in the affairs, and issues of things in this worthless and giddy world; to stretch themselves into Gods line, by inquiries after things wrapt up in futurity; and fills them too full of vain hopes or fears, to take up with composed and thankfull minds in that present portion which the hand of Providence deals out to them.

2. The observation of any such objects of common wonder, as presages, is also a *grounddess, headless vanity*. The person that entertains his thoughts and studies much with them, gives (like those in that famine. 2 Kings 6.) a great price for an *asses head*. The Opinion (like the image of *Nebuchadnezzar*) while it pretends to a *head of gold*, to promise Oracles and the knowledge of futurities, it stands for ought I can discover; but upon these two weak feet of clay,

1. *Narrow and scanty observation*; Men (it may be) have heretofore observed some few evils to tread close upon the heels of these or the like Prodigies, and therefore are easily perswaded that they were ushered by them; and they can never after shew themselves, but it is presumed they come forth to deliver some sad and ungrateful message. It is this also hath given credit to the observation of some, as *auspicious*, others as *inauspicious* days in the life of some great Persons, especially, viz. the observation of some happy or unhappy Events which the womb of such a morning hath perhaps twice or thrice brought forth unto men. As there are *lusus Naturæ*, of which before; so (be it spoken with reverence) there are *lusus Providentiæ*. God is pleased to display his multifarious Wisdom in the many pretty varieties in Nature; and seems delighted with some pleasant constancies and uniformities in the works of Providence; whereof the sending of many great blessings or afflictions upon a person, just on such a day of the week, or returning year, is an especial instance; and this perhaps to try whether we be such *men in understanding* as not to suffer any distrust of his providence to break in upon us upon such a day, or after such accidents, because of some little disasters formerly befalling us then, more then at another time. Psal. 110. 3.

2. *Weak and childish dislike of things*; Objects and Persons we conceive a kinde and courteous Opinion of, we can easily perswade our selves come forth with good tidings; we can readily look for an emblem of peace from the lovely dove. But where matters ungratefull fall before us, we usually serve our little hatreds, by deriving upon them the Opinion of being ill abodements, and we quickly conceit, that they come about us (like the hated birds of night) against a time of mourning. For we may observe that the 2 Sam. 18. 27.

occurrences to which imagination hath affixed the Opinion of their being ill *Omens*, are generally such as we shrink from, and follow with dislike, *as the firing of houses by lightning, monstrous and deformed births, dreadfull eclipses, apparitions in the air, strange voices heard in the night, earthquakes, bloudy waters*, &c. We hate these things, and therefore avenge our selves of them, as we can, by a vain conceit, that they *prophesie onely evil things concerning us*. This Opinion then having no better support to trust unto, it were to over-value it, to put forth any great strength of reason, to throw it down.

Onely perhaps some contemplative Persons may perswade themselves, that the foundation of this Opinion is not laid so much upon the surface, as I would make my Reader to believe; for as there was a pretty conceit among some of the Ancient and more mystical sort of Philosophers, that all things in the upper and *intelligible world*, were limned forth in some parallel instances and similar figures here below, and that τὰ νοητὰ, matters intelligible were τὰ ἄνω αἰσθητῶν πληρώματα, but the true fillings up of things sensible, which carry but some general and rude lines and images of them; thus some persons seem strongly perswaded that all the greater works of God are pourtrayed, and shadowed out first in some little pictures and images of them, and that therefore many strange accidents are but σκιαὶ τῶν μελλόντων, and to be received as a kinde of *shadows of things to come*, & as a sort of ὑποδείγματα καὶ ἀρχέτυπα exemplars and types of some great and unusual work to follow after. Thus the sinking of the *Lambeth Ferry-boat* with the *Arch-Bishops* coach-horses, and coach-men, to the bottom of the *Thames*, *Sept.* 19. 1633. the very first day he removed from *Fulham* to *Lambeth*, was (saith one) *no doubt a presage of his own and the Arch-Bishopricks sinking through his pride and violence*. (with as good reason may I add, that their swimming again at last, was a signe that the function should at last appear above water.) But I believe it will appear to the most altogether unnecessary to bestow much breath to break this pretty bubble, which hath nothing but wind therein, and will break and refute it self, by its own aiery, unstable and transparent principles: though perhaps with some (that know not to distinguish between an argument and a similitude) the conceit may appear of more value and moment.

Author of the Breviat of the life of Arch-Bish. Laud. p. 35.

Apparitions whether (in the air) of Armies of cities, or by any particular application of Angels good or bad in a way of counsel and conference (reckoned among *Prodigies Preternatural*, no power transcendent to created being exerted in them) may perhaps appear in this place, argument big enough to deserve a more serious and particular examination. In which undertaking, I may hope for pardon, if (standing in no better light) I hit the butt though not the white, and deliver what may seem most consistent with sobriety and approach nearest to the truth.

All that I think fit to offer in this Argument, shall be disposed under these five *Propositions*;

Propos. 1. First, *There have been some such apparitions as these mentioned.* I readily grant that this Argument (like an enchanted house) is full of

of Phantasms, and delusive images; and that many stories of this Nature there are which like Spectres are filled out in shew with body and substance, which when we come to handle and examine by making search into their grounds and evidence, we shall find them vanishing into the ayr of common report, or the single testimony of some superstitious or melancholy imaginant. And therefore (I know) many men are not at all impressive to any such relations, but look upon them all but as (apparitions indeed) things which never advanc'd nearer to realities, then the images of a dream.

Look as in Religion, some men (to present God but with a flattering faith) take great pleasure to invent new mysteries therein, to fancy a βάθος, somewhat inexplicable in every article thereof, till they have made it a contradiction to the most natural maximes and easy sense of our minds, and a scandal to men that can discourse: so others are very busy in filling up every depth, and removing every real mystery therein, till they have left no image or footstep of its unsearchable Authour, thereupon thus it comes to pass in the matters of providence, some men are hugely taken with mysteries therein, delighted to hear and relate τι καινότερον somewhat new and strange, their *pia Mater* is alway big with some religious *Legend*, or *prophecy*, to obtrude upon the easy world as a divine discovery. Others again would remove all prodigies, apparitions, and what ever goes off from the figures and measures of common and ordinary, and know not to admit a perswasion of any thing, of whose causes, ends or examples, they are not aware.

Lucian commends this temper in *Epicurus, Democritus, Metrodorus,* that if any thing rare and wonderfull, fell before their consideration, they had put on ἀδαμαντίνην γνώμην, a resolution as inflexible as adamant to endeavour a solution thereof, and its reduction to the proper ends and causes: which if they were able to doe, well and good; but if not, to arrest all further search and wonder with this sentence, ψεῦδός ἐστι καὶ γενέσθαι ἀδύνατον, it is a lie, and impossible to be at all. (An easy art to maintain the repute of understanding men!) And we shall not seldom find men (especially such as are arrived at no great experience of themselves or things) advancing the length of their own understanding and experience (like as our Englisn King did his arme) the common standard and measure of the truth or falshood of things; an instance of which temper appears in their slow and heavy motion to a faith of such things (apparitions among the rest) whose natures, causes, ends or patterns fall not within their compass. But certainly as to be of a waxen faith, impressive to any narrations of this nature, is an instance of softness and superstition, so an obstinate and pertinacious incredulity, retains a little to Atheism, because removing one of the greatest and most pregnant arguments of a Deity, and gives cause of suspicion that the Person hath *ingenium difficulter sanabile* in Religion, which (as we may observe) is so managed, as to suppose men candid and ingenuous, such as will sit down with high probabilities, where the condition of the things to be believed, admits not evidence and demonstra-

In Alexand.

monſtration. The ſtories of all times are full of relations of ſuch things as theſe, and therefore unbelief in this particular, is guilty of the rudeneſs of giving the lie to the world. They which have *itching ears* for ſuch ſtories may have them ſufficiently ſcratcht by *Cardanus*, *Groſius*, and other writers in this curious argument.

Cardan. De Rer. Variet. l. 14. c. 69. & l. 15. c. 78. *Groſ. Magic. de ſpectris.* Propoſ. 2.

Secondly, *It ſeems probable that ſome Apparitions in the ayr have been intended the Monitors of ſome judgement approaching.* I ſhall inſtance but in two examples; One mentioned by *Joſephus*, who tells us that a little before the deſtruction of *Hieruſalem* by the Romane army [ἅρματα τε φάλαγγες ἔνοπλοι διὰ νεφῶν] there appeared amongſt other prodigies chariots and armed companies of horſmen iſſuing out of the clouds, and intercepting the heavens with the multitude of their troops, which was received by him and others (not ſo drunk with pride and opinion as the reſt) a repreſentation (ὡς ἐν ὕπνῳ) of the marching forth of the great *Lord of hoſts* with all warlike appoyntments to take vengeance of that rebellious city and nation.

Joſeph. de Bel. Jud. l. 7. c. 12.

Our other example ſhall be taken from an Authour credited by Apoſtolical citation, the writer of the *book of Maccabees*, who ſpeaking of *Hieruſalem*, thus delivers himſelf,

Hebr. 11. 35, 36.

It happened that through all the city, for the ſpace of almoſt 40. days, there were ſeen horſmen running in the ayr, in cloth of gold, and armed with lances like a band of Soldiers;

1 Book ch. 5. ver. 2.

And troops of horſmen in array, encountring one againſt another, with ſhakeing of ſhields, and multitude of pikes and drawing of ſwords, and caſting of darts, and glittering of golden ornaments, and harneſs of all ſorts.

After the mention of which apparition, we may read there what a ſcene of woes and tragedies the City was made by the Armies of *Antiochus*.

Now I think we may diſcover ſome probable and darker characters of divine ſigns upon theſe examples, but eſpecially the firſt; And that,

Romphæa ſcil. de cælo Urbi imminens, flamma in Templo viſa, fores Templi ſponte apertæ, currus & armatæ phalanges conſpectæ in nubibus, &c. Grot. in loc.

1. *Becauſe our Saviour propheſied that the deſolation of that people, ſhould be preſac'd by fearfull ſights, and great ſigns from heaven*, Luk. 21. 11. a place which our expoſitours generally conceive fulfilled in that and other prodigious accidents related by *Joſephus*, (and ſubſcrib'd unto by *Euſebius*) as the *atrati & deformes nuncii* of ſo fearfull a deſtruſtruction as enſued.

2. *Becauſe the deſtruction of Hieruſalem was a kinde of viſible prophecy, and type of the final deſtruction of the world:* now that the ſign and thing ſignified might the more exactly touch; as at the laſt day, the *heavens ſhall be on fire, and the earth* with all its works be *burnt up*, and the whole Creation feel its final and moſt dreadfull pangs and throws; ſo the deſtruction of *Hieruſalem* was uſher'd by its φοβητρὰ, *fearfull ſights*, mighty Earthquakes, a fiery ſword, a flame in the Temple: And as at the laſt day, the Angels ſhall be the Miniſters of his juſtice, and increaſe the terrours of his coming, by attending the Judge of quick and dead, (Mat. 25. 31.) ſo this judgement upon *Hieruſalem* came with *obſervation*, and the ſolemnity of Angelical apparitions (repreſented by chariots, and armed companies, ſuitably to the words

words of the Psalmist concerning them. *The Chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of Angels.*) In short, some of the Prodigies preceding the fates of *Hierusalem*, seem such equal and proportion'd representatives, of those more terrible disguizes which the face of nature must put on, at that last and great Day, that the so call'd *Sibylline* Oracles, make choice of many of them to describe the horrours of it by, Ps. 68. 17. 2 K. 6. 17.

Cum visi fuerint cœli stellantis in Orbi
Nocturni gladii, casus ad solis & ortus,
Pulvis & è cœlo terram descendet in omnem,
Protinus & medio cursu, lux aurea solem
Deseret, & terram fulgenti lumine luna
Sanguineis guttis stellantibus irradiabit,
Signaque saxa dabunt, & in alta prælia nube
Cernetis peditumque equitumque sonantibus auris. Orac. Sibyl. l. 3.

And lib. 4.

Enses atque tubæ simul, & sole Exoriente
Terribilem sonitum, mugitumque audiet omnis
Mundus ———

Of which and the like passages therein occurring, some (presuming upon the pretended antiquity of those Oracles) conceive the strange Prodigies related by *Ovid* (not as an Historian but a Poet) lib. 15. *Metamor.* to be but an imitation; so great the agreement between them both in words and matter. Beginning with, *Arma ferunt inter nigras crepitantia nubes, Terribilesque tubas, &c.*

Thirdly, *We shall observe that Gods works of a more catholick concern, have been ushered with some lighter essays to, and representations of them:* thus the several appearances of God in the shape and figures of a Man, are commonly receiv'd as the *præludia*, (a Kind of *μικραὶ πλάσεις*) to that great mistery of the incarnation. The general conversion of the Gentiles was as it were essay'd in the particular conversions now of a person, and then of a family to the Jewish Church. The universal conflagration of the world seems limn'd forth in the fiery destruction of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*; That mighty storm of vengeance which fell upon *Hierusalem* and the Jewish Politie, was prefac'd (by some lesser drops) the many miseries, which our Saviour stiles *ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων, the beginning of sorrows*: and those judgements of an unusual make and character, which sometimes overtake more publick and notorious criminals, seem a kinde of *præjudicia judicii*, and assurances that God *hath appointed one* great *Day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness*. Thus the relation of his going forth to his *strange work* indeed, upon *Hierusalem*, attended with the visible apparitions of Angels in armed troops in the ayr may be concluded probable; that so there may be some slender draught of the solemnity of that day, when *the thrones of Judgement shall be set, and the Judge (attended with ten thousand times ten thousand ministring unto him)* proceed to his last Act of justice upon the unrighteous world. Mat. 24. 8. Act. 17. 31. Dan. 7. 10.

These considerations incline me to receive this narration and the significancy thereof (especially because not knowing where to fix the accomplishment of our Saviours prediction, Luk. 21. 11. but in

In this and ſome other prodigies related by *Joſephus*) with the favour of a great probability, but not as an undoubted truth.

1. *Becauſe the ſingle credit of Joſephus* (*Euſebius* but relating the ſame things in his words) *ſeems ſcarce ſufficient to venture the faith of ſuch a ſtory upon*, both becauſe having much converſt among the Gentiles, he ſeems to ſmell a little of the Gentile ſuperſtition, when he adds, immediately after this relation, *It would ſeem a matter ſcarce credible, but that there follow'd evils great enough for the ſolemnity of preſages*; as alſo becauſe it will appear upon a compare of the ſame Stories related in Scripture and *Joſephus*, that he uſually tunes his relations to the common humour both of Greek and Latine Hiſtorians, making them to ſound as much as much as might be to the glory and honour of his own Nation.

Καὶ ἀ ἐορ ſὴ βὸς μὲν ἀχ- θεῖσα ἐπὶ τὸ πρὸς τὴν θυσίαν ἔτεκεν ἄρνα ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ μέσῳ. Ἰωσ. Ἀλωσ. λ. 5. κ. ιδ'.

2. *Becauſe he hath put in one fly* (the ſtory of a Heifer, which comeing to the Altar brought forth a Lamb) *which makes the whole relation of his other prodigies, ſmell ſtrongly of an impoſture.* 'Tis ſufficiently known how much this reſembles many other legends related in the Romane ſtories, where the mention of prodigies occurrs. Can any man think God would ever work ſo ludicrous, ſo cheap, ſo inſignificant a miracle?

3. *Becauſe, whereas he there alſo relates the ſtory of the Prieſts their going into the Temple about Pentecoſt to attend the Sacra Veſpertina*, and hearing that voyce therein μεταβαίνωμεν ἐντεῦθεν, *let us goe hence*, ſeconded with the ruſhing as of perſons going out, the whole matter ſeems but a fable originally invented by ſome ſuperſtitious heathen (and a little diſguis'd) whoſe uſual doctrine was that the *Gods* when their Temples and Altars were defil'd, or taken, us'd to take pett, and (*adytis ariſque relictis*) to betake themſelves to ſome more hallow'd and magnificent ſhrines. Sure I am, *Tacitus* appears to underſtand this relation to ſome ſuch ſenſe as this. But I think I need not much concern my ſelf to throw out a relation, which hath had peaceable poſſeſſion of the common faith for ſo many ages; for (to ſay no more) 'tis in many regards, an example extraordinary, and 'tis a good maxime, *examples extraordinary neither break a rule, nor make one.*

Expanſæ ſubitò fores delubri, & audita major humana vox, excedere Deos, ſimul ingens motus excedentium. Hiſt. Jud. l. 5.

Upon which account alone, I have no great fear that the other inſtance wil much prejudice our cauſe though I allow both a truth and a ſignificancy to that apparition: though perhaps I ſhould not have judg'd ſo much in favour thereof had I not been brib'd by the authority which the ſuffrages of ſo many wiſe men, and the antiquity of the Authour ſeem to drive upon that *Apocryphal* writing wherein it is found.

Propoſ. 3. Thirdly, *There appears not now any ground at all to receive any ſuch apparitions in the ayr as the certain ſigns and monitours of any calamities to enſue upon a Nation*, and that,

Firſt, *Becauſe we have no warrant from the Book of God, ſo to regard them, having no precept at all to oblige us, nor yet any example therein to encourage us.* The ſigns of future events which we ſometimes find God making uſe of, were ſuch as (out of their inſtitution) were no way apt to foreſhew any any ſuch event; they were moſt commonly *ſigna*

ad

ad placitum, such as carried no similitudes of the things whereof they were signs (as the apparitions of armies in the air seem to do of some succeeding battel) that so none might be encouraged afterward to regard them as *Omens*, when again occurring; and fancy that they ministred at all to the vanity of any such observations. Now a negative argument from Scripture, seems conclusive enough, in a matter wherein the faith of a Divine prescience and providence, and mans dutifull observance of God in the way of his judgements, appear so much concerned and assisted, as we are told they are in the religious observation of such things as these.

Secondly, *Such kinde of signs would lay men naked and exposed to perpetual delusions and impostures:* for how often do the antick shapes of the clouds, serve the imaginations of dragons, and armies in the air? That word חזיזים Zech. 10. 1. which we render clouds, the LXX (by a verbal mistake of the radix) translate φαντασίας, *apparitiones:* and a melancholy fancy is as subject (to this real mistake) the translating of clouds into apparitions of Churches or castles, or armies. Can any serious Person then believe that God would have us apply our selves to such a *Proteus* as a cloud is, for a solution of any doubt *de futuro*, which can shift into any shapes and forms of things? Hath he not all along appear'd to value our understandings at a higher rate, then to require them to a regard of things so exposed to suspicion and the conceit of some imposture?

Thirdly, *Such kinde of apparitions in the air, have been known not succeeded by any black and tragical Event.* The truth is, Wisdom (which useth to draw her lines by the steady and even rule of some well assumed principles) hath not appear'd so critical an observer of such accidents and their Events, as folly hath been; and therefore we are not so well provided of examples to reprehend this vanity, as otherwise we might be. I must therefore satisfie my self with a single instance which occurrs in a learned and sober Writer, who delivers it as a matter reported to him by Persons of good credit, how that in the year before he recorded that relation, there were *seen two opposite Battalions in the air, lancing out their spears, and discharging (as it were) their muskets, victory now reeling, and in the end one side giving chase to the other.* Whereas all these things proved but *è vitro fulgura*, being followed onely with jubilees and the *voice of joy and peace* in our dwellings for many years. Nor can they be (with any colour of reason) presumed to foreshew our succeeding civil wars, being removed by the distance of so many years. Now, one negative instance in such cases, is of more force to unfix and discredit a pretending rule, then two affirmatives to establish it; because the latter (the World being so full of evils) may fall out by a kinde of chance, or the agency of seducing Spirits, whereas the former seem to proclaim some necessity of the Event in nature, and the no purpose at all of God to give notice of any of his counsels by any such emergencies as these.

Sandys *his Transl.* Ovid. *Met. p.* 291.

Anno 1629.

Fourthly, *I doubt not but many of these aery apparitions might be solved by a natural cause.* To let pass the conceit of real armies somewhere

fighting on earth, reflected in the clouds as in a glass, (as at best, but an ingenuous vanity) the supposed firing of Ordinance and muskets, is I believe generally nothing but the coruscation of some incensed exhalations breaking forth by pauses and intervals from the clouds, and (as thunder doth) with the noises and terrours of those military engines: The running to and fro of horse-men and companies may be represented to an active fancy, by the clouds carried by the unconstant force of the winds to very giddy and unequal figures and motions. The stands of pikes and spears may be but the ragged and deformed protuberances of the disturbed clouds. Onely I am apt to believe that Nature draws the images of these things in such rude and imperfect figures, that men are forced much to assist and quicken the dulness and defectiveness of the type by the fictions of imagination.

Fifthly, *Some of these aery apparitions and noises are managed with that method and artifice, come forth in such chosen seasons* (if we credit relations) *that I doubt not to intitle them to the power and operation of the Aery Principality.* Impure Spirits (like juglers) may oft do strange tricks, to call upon themselves the regards of the world, and when they see causes big with their effects, may by such signs foreshew them, to derive upon themselves, either the Opinion of prescience, or of some great affection to men, whom they awaken, though indeed it be, but as *Delilah* did *Samson*, when (the Philistines) some great evils are just upon them; or else (as S. *Austin* speaks) *noxiæ curiositatis retibus implicare*, to fly-blow the minds of men with curious and impertinent enquiries into times to come.

Sure I am, we finde the Appearances of armies and the noise of arms and trumpets in the air, found among such bad company (so many hatefull *Omens* and Prodigies observed by the Heathen) as is sufficient to blemish them, and to give suspicion that the observation and production of both, was owing to the same Father of lies. *Ubi supr.* *Ovid* having mentioned the noise of armies and trumpets heard in the clouds, relates (as presages of equal place and repute) the weeping of Statues, the wandring of Ghosts, the odd figures and colour of the Sacrifice, and the like doth *Virgil* in that place so often cited.

The Devil well knew that without the maintaining of some Opinion of his foresight in the minds of men, the fires on his altars would quickly go out, and therefore he appointed all the changes in the *Exta*, in the face of heaven, in the births of creatures, in the flying of birds, &c. as a kinde of signs from the Gods of some great and strange effects; which when he saw their causes to swell out withall, and just ready to be delivered of them, he could easily bring about, (all these little changes, falling within the compass of his power) that on which side soever the die of affairs fell, were the success of an undertaking on this side or that, he might still secure the repute of his prescience, by holding his easie Votaries in hand, that the preceding Prodigies were a warning of the things which fell out: and therefore he served the ends of imposture much better

ter upon theſe dumb and doubtfull, then his ſpeaking Oracles; wherein he hazarded his credit greatly by returning doubtfull or falſe ſolutions to the queſtions propoſed to him *de futuro:* well therefore may the Devil be preſumed (upon an eaſie foreſight of ſome great diſaſter) to cauſe the entrails of the Sacrifice to put on a ſad and unuſual face: (and therefore the Poet upon ſuch an accident, ſpake more truth then he was aware,

---- *cæſique in viſcera Tauri*
Inferni venêre Dei. ----) So alſo upon his ſight of an approaching battel, he may eaſily give forth a prophetick emblem thereof, in ſome ſuch martial images and impreſſions upon the aery Region, his proper province.

If all this ſatisfie not, I ſhall readily deliver the Reader to the freedom of his own judgement in reference to ſuch things. For my ſelf, when I finde in the Book of God, that holy and heavenly *Hoſt*, not called forth but to wait upon ſome great and important Services (the protection of a Patriarch, or a great Prophet, the declaration of the Birth of the Son of God, or perhaps to attend Gods great act of juſtice upon *Jeruſalem*) I know not to entertain any ſuch cheap and little thoughts of them as once to imagine that the Angels are ever ſent forth to run a tilt in the air to finde the vain world talk, and to tell it news, or that God would ever confer the honour of ſo ſolemn and great a preſage upon a paultrey battel at ſea or land, which is generally intended but to ſerve the luſts and paſſions of men which have broken all thoſe cords of love, precepts of charity, whereby they were bound one unto another.

Fourthly, *The Apparitions of evil Angels, in what places, forms, companies, and their premonitions by what voices, and ſigns ſoever, ought not to be attended unto as the prognoſticks of any Events whatſoever.* Many relations there are current in Writers and common converſe of ſuch apparitions in very terrible forms, and that before ſome great plagues and wars: and I ſhall not once attempt to build my cauſe upon the ruines of the credit of them all. (we finde in Scripture, the fall of *Saul* and *Jonathan* foretold by the apparition of an evil Angel) Such apparitions have happened (though generally in times and places of greateſt ignorance and ſuperſtition) and that perhaps (as was ſaid) that theſe lying Spirits may maintain an Opinion of their foreſight of things (though the matters ſignified by them be ſuch as may eaſily be diſcovered in their natural or moral cauſes) or to derive a ſuſpicion upon the ſtories of Angelical apparitions in ſacred Writ, or to get ſuch a ſtock of credit, whereby they may ſet up cheaters with the leſs ſuſpicion for the future: or perhaps in a kinde of petty triumph over thoſe men whoſe ſins together with their temptations, have betrayed them to ſuch fearfull judgements; or perhaps (evil Angels being often the Executioners of his judgements) God will have theſe *Apollyons* ſeen (as it were) upon the ſtage before execution, that men may know and conſider into whoſe hands, in all likelihood, their iniquities have betrayed them. Propoſ. 4. V. Dr. *Jackſon.* Serm. Luk. 13.5. pag 18. Dr. *H. More* Myſt. Godl. li. 2. c. 2. Pſal. 78.44.

But admit the depths of God or the Devil in ſuch apparitions paſt

our fathoming; ſure I am we have no warrant at all to give any evil Spirit the honour of the leaſt truſt and regard, by an obſervance of any word, action or ſigne of his. God would diſown one of his Royal titles, when once black'd and profaned by the Devils uſurpation, Hoſ. 2. 16, 17. our Saviour refuſed a juſt and true teſtimony to his Divinity, when given in by the Father of lies, Mark 1.24. Gods ſervants refuſe his good creatures when once ſet upon the Devils table, 1 Cor. 10.21. We are allowed no *fellowſhip with devils*, by whom truth is never told but to ſerve ſome deluſion and impoſture. And therefore though we read, Pſal. 78.49. that God ſometimes made uſe of evil Angels as the *Executioners* of his judgements, yet never that he commiſſionated any of them to be the *Denouncers* of them.

To receive therefore the apparitions, voices, drummings, or antick noiſes of Spirits in any place whatſoever, as preſages of ſome approaching evils (as if like ſome ſtrange creatures in the ſea, they uſed to ſhew themſelves, and play in ſight againſt a ſtorm) is to conſult ſhame to our ſelves and our Religion; *To our ſelves*] becauſe rendring our ſelves thereby to the ſuſpicion of having a great credulity and curioſity, (pregnant arguments of a ſoft, vain, and unfurniſhed minde) *To our Religion*] deriving upon it an appearance of falſhood in thoſe many aſſurances it offers us of the treacheries and impoſtures of thoſe forſaken Spirits. Such apparitions report nothing to us with truth and faithfulneſs, but (what they tempt men leaſt to believe) the Being of a God; and ſo (as the Vipers fleſh cures its own biting) enable us to quote the Devil againſt Satan, and to caſt him out by himſelf. It is therefore our wiſdom not to invite the Devil ſo far to be our Oracle as to vouchſafe the leaſt credit or regard to any of his prophetick ſpeeches, poſtures, actions; but to reſolve to take the goodneſs and providence of God as ſecurity ſufficient for the peace and compoſure of our minds, and not to put our ſelves out of his keeping (and ſo make way for the accompliſhment of any of them) by any diſtruſtfull fears, ariſing from any ſigns whatſoever given forth by ſo ſworn an enemy to God, truth, and the peace of man.

Propoſ. 5. Fifthly, *The appearances of good Angels are now rarely given, hardly diſcovered, never to be expected*; I ſay, *Rarely given*] I do not ſay, *never*, leſt I ſpeak without book. To omit ſome very probable relations of this nature, that Apparition is uſually thought a Herauld from heaven which adviſed *James* the fourth of *Scotland* (in whoſe counſels at that time the concerns of a Nation were wrapt up) to forbear ſome vicious practices, but eſpecially the fighting of his intended battel with the Engliſh; in thoſe words, *Rex, Ego ad te miſſus ſum, ut te admoneam, nè quò inſtituiſti progrediaris; quam admonitionem ſi neglexeris, non erit è re tua, nec eorum qui te comitabuntur.* Which counſel he neglecting, himſelf, moſt of his Nobles, and army fell in that fatal battel. *Hardly diſcovered*] For how eaſily may the Devil impoſe upon our ſimplicity in the livery of an Angel of light? Though I think this negative ſigne of ſuch an apparition faithfull

See the ſtory more fully related by D^r. Jackſon, ubi ſuprà, *from the Hiſtorian.*

faithfull enough, viz. That theſe Sons of God never debaſe themſelves to ſuch antick ſhapes, ludicrous poſtures and actions, monſtrous forms, weak rites which evil ſpirits (deſigning to get to themſelves the homage of a great fear from ſome men; or to abuſe their imaginations, or to diſhonour the image and figure of man (whom they ſo much hate) or to appear rather ridiculous then abominable) uſually doe. *Never to be expected*] becauſe never promiſed: beſides converſe with Angels is a bleſſing which our ſtate of infirmity could not bear, and our follies cannot well admit.

And this I ſuppoſe may ſuffice to tender concerning theſe ſecond kind of *Prodigies ſignal*; Stil'd ſo (*ex communi fide*) becauſe vulgar faith hath prefer'd them to the repute of divine ſigns and intimations; which I thought fit again to intimate, to excuſe the *indecorum* of my applying of the term without the reaſon thereof, ſo frequently unto them.

CHAP. IV.

Concerning Prodigies (in appearance) Supernatural.

Some Prodigies inſtanc'd in, which ſeem Supernatural, *the truth in reference to them deliver'd in 4 Propoſitions.* Lying Oracles and Miracles *of eſpecial uſe to advance the Devils kingdome. Strange events not to be eaſily judg'd miraculous, and why. The firſt fiery eruption of* Veſuvius, *probably concluded a ſigne of judgement, and the reaſons of that aſſertion. What to be thought of that fiery ſword which hung over* Hieruſalem. *No prodigies (in appearance)* Supernatural, *to be received now as ſigns; and why?*

THere are ſome events (which the hiſtory of times preſents us with) of ſo peculiar and ſtrange a make and character, that they ſtand alone in Nature, and their cauſes ſtand ſo much in the dark, that they ſeem to enter a very fair and plauſible plea for the repute of a miracle. Such as are the turning of Ponds and lakes (in appearance) into bloud: ſwords as of fire ſeen to hang over cities for ſeveral days together; the removal of mountains, or other parts of the Earth, for ſeveral furlongs, from their natural places, ſome ſtrange alterations obſerved in the motions and tempers of the birds and beaſts, or figures and colours of any of the heavenly bodies. With theſe I reckon ſome ſuddain interceſſions of the light of the ſun, occaſioned, not by the veil of an eclipſe caſt before it, but ſome unaccountable paſſion of the luminous body it ſelf. Such a *deliquium* we read of immediately ſubſequent to the death of *Cæſar*, concluded by the Ethnick Poet, a kinde of prodigious ſhrinking of the eye of heaven from the view of ſo black a wickedneſs as the aſſaſſination of ſo excellent a perſon, who upon occaſion thereof, thus expreſſeth himſelf,

Vir. Georg. l. 1.

Ille etiam extincto miseratus Cæsare *Romam*
Cum caput obscura nitidum ferrugine tinxit,
Impiaque æternam timuerunt sæcula noctem.

Not. in Job. c. 9. v. 7.

An example parallel whereunto, is related by *Lavater*, who reports that in the year 1585. *Mar.* 12. such a darkness suddainly cover'd the earth, that the birds went to roost at noon, and the guilty fears of men antedated the day of judgment. A like instance whereunto (in another kinde) is the suddain *torpor* and standing still of great currents, and the parting of their waters in so wonderfull a manner, that they seem to carry some figures and imitations of those miraculous divisions of waters recorded in sacred Writ.

Such was that (mention'd in our Chronicles) which hapned Anno. 1399 when the river of *Ouse* in *Bedfordshire*, parted asunder near *Harold* in that County, the waters from the fountain standing still, and those towards the Sea giving way, so that it was passable over on foot for 3 miles together. To which I add that unparllel eruption of fire from the mountain *Vesuvius*, first hapning in the second year of *Titus*; of which it may be truly said, that if all the characters of horrour, enumerated by Historians, were duly weighed, it would be hard to finde its pattern but in Scripture, where we *read of a Mountain which quaked greatly, and that burnt with fire to the midst of heaven,* Exod. 19. 18. Deut. 4. 11. *with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.*

Now, though I am far from giving to all these effects the repute of a miracle (as may appear by my marshalling of some of them under other heads) much less of a signe; yet because Nature seems not in these as in other Prodigies, to err by any known law, and some of them at least, are so wonderfull, that (to speak truth) they stand in *confinio miraculi*, I thought good to discourse them apart, and as inclos'd under another name and notion. And the rather, because if our Adversaries should chance to call a knub a horn, to stile these, (or some other of the forementioned prodigies) supernatural and miraculous, they might seem (like *Proteus*) to avoyd all the knots they cannot unloose, (reasons they cannot answer) by shifting forms, and that event which they cannot advance a signe of the time *sub nomine prodigii*, they may possibly assay to doe, *sub specie miraculi.*

All therefore that I shall offer concerning Prodigies Supernatural (whether in truth or pretence, I shall not much enquire) shall be coucht in these few ensuing propositions;

Propos. 1. First, *It is a great example of rashness, easily to intitle any strange effect* (whose cause stands not in a good light) *supernatural and miraculous*, and that upon a four-fold account;

1. *We understand not the just extent and compass of that sphear of activity assigned to bare natural powers, nor how far they may* (in some circumstances) *exceed the lines of common and ordinary operation.* How many works of Art are there, scarce the wonder of our days, the performance whereof, in the rudeness of former times, would have prefer'd a man to the repute of *Simon Magus, the great power of God?* who would not (two or three hundred years agoe) have voucht the breaking down of mighty walls by the force and powers of a little black

black duſt, as great an impoſſibility, as the *Indians* did the communicating by letters at ſo great a diſtance? we underſtand not fully how far our notions of poſſible and impoſſible (when we are amongſt Agents natural) are fixt and faithfull. As for the miracles wrought by our Saviour, leaſt any ſhadow of natural power might ſeem to aſſiſt and ſo to diſparage them, he uſually exerted his Divinity in *rayſing of the dead, reſtoring of a man born blinde to ſight, in curing the woman whom Art had given for deſperate,* Luk. 8. 43. *in commanding the wave and ſtorms into reſt and ſilence with a word*; and ſuch like works which evidently appear'd to lie *extra vias naturæ*, ſuch whereof no magician ever attempted the counterfeit: otherwiſe his miracles had left open a wide door for infidelity to break out at.

2. *We underſtand not fully how far the power and dominion of the Prince of the powers of the Ayr extends, and how far he is able to ape a Miracle, by thoſe wonderfull impreſſions, he can make upon natural bodies.* We read of his doing great wonders, cauſing *fire to come down from heaven,* Rev. 13. 13. The two ways whereby God hath advanc'd his kingdom, are *Oracles* and *Miracles*; and we ſhall finde *Lucifer* his ambition of being *Similis Altiſſimo*, expreſt in his (though) λόγια καὶ τέρατα ψεύδους, lying Oracles and miracles. For we read of the deliverers of falſe prophecies, and the doers of falſe miracles foretold as immediately ſubſequent to our B. Saviours aſcenſion, Mat. 24. 24. and ſome expound thoſe two *horns* [ὅμοια ἀρνίῳ] like to the *Lamb*, which the *Dragon* is ſaid to have, of thoſe two powers of giving forth (though tinſell) Prophecies and Miracles, whereby the Devil in his emiſſaries did heretofore ape and reſemble the *Lamb* and his followers. And ſo fair a ſtamp and appearance had he ſet upon them, that the *World* was deceived with them. Nay *Hierocles* (which yet had the touchſtone of Philoſophy to diſcover them by) was ſo far abus'd and cheated by thoſe *lying wonders* wrought by that Arch Magician *Apollonius*, that (as appears from what *Euſebius* wrote againſt him) he durſt vie them with thoſe mighty miracles, wrought by our B. Saviour himſelf. To aſſert therefore the foremention'd, or the like extraordinary works, to be tranſcendent to the powers and abilities of the infernal kingdome, or that evil ſpirits can ſerve no ends of impoſture in any of them, is an aſſertion which ſeems to me to have more of heat then light therein.

Rev. 13. 11.

Verſ. 14.

3. *We finde all along that God reſerv'd his miracles onely to attend ſome great and excellent ends and occaſions:* ſo great that the perſon and ſervice of *John the Baptiſt*, ſeem'd not great enough to receive the honour of a Miracle. We read of but three Ages of Miracles, 1. When the law was to be given and the Jewiſh Oeconomy to be ſettled, and that amongſt a people too dull and heavy to be wrought upon by arguments and diſcourſes; 2. When the law was to be reſtor'd to its juſt reverence and regard, amongſt that Apoſtate people (the ten Tribes) who were fallen into ſo lethargick a ſleep, that there was no awakening of them into a ſenſe of God and duty, but by the loud voyce of ſome mighty ſigns and wonders; 3. When that Oeconomy which was founded in ſigns and wonders was now to expire,

and

and to give place to the kingdom of the *Messiah*. It would speak us therefore greatly ignorant of the sacredness of a miracle, to give the honour thereof to every strange relation, of which our philosophy can give no very smooth and consistent an account. The laws of Nature proceed upon a more excellent counsel and wisdom, then that we may presume them rescinded upon any little or unknown occasions.

4. *God's miracles came forth heretofore attended* generally *with instruction*; being wrought by those *men of God*, who were able to point to their intended ends, and declare the meaning of God in them. Miracles are Gods seal, and therefore some writing and evidence they must be affixt unto, for as the writing without the seal wants authority, so the seal without the writing, certainty and significancy. Gods miraculous works have been generally level'd to some humane benefit (either the confirmation of men in some important truth, or the curing of some desperate disease, or the supplying of them in some urgent strait, or the affrighting of them from some destructive practise) never solely to the advancement of his own power and greatness (sufficiently reported, as the Apostle tells us, by the *things which are made*) and therefore tis but necessary that we understand what errand this or that supposed miracle comes forth upon, and upon what account we are concern'd therein. Where men understand not the meaning of Gods voice, *he speaks but into the ayr*. Now what prophet have we able to lead us to the true meaning of any such great wonder? if it be Gods Embassadour, where is the *Interpreter* that can expound its language?

1 Cor. 14. 9.

Upon a consideration of the premises, I understand not how any hasty conclusions now, concerning the miraculousness of any strange event, can reconcile themselves to counsel and sobriety.

Propos. 2. Secondly, *Two of the foremention'd occurrences may probably be admitted the intended signs of an approaching judgement*, viz. First, That dreadfull eruption of fire from *mount Vesuvius* in *Campania* (first happning in the second year of *Titus*, after the destruction of *Hierusalem* by the Romane souldiers under his command) which was attended with such tragedies, that the reverend D. *Jackson* doth more then incline to believe that the foremention'd places in *Joel* and S. *Luke*, had (*at least*) their first accomplishment in that prodigious event. A conjecture which will bid fair for a probability, if we take but a little pains to compare Gods Text, and the Historians comment both together;

* Comment. on the Creed. l. 1. c. 24. & Append.

Joel 2. 30.
I will shew wonders in the heavens, and in the earth.

Ita verò res acta; Viri multi & magni omnem naturam humanam excedentes, quales exprimuntur Gygantes, partim in ipso monte, partim in agro circumjacente, ac in Oppidis interdiu noctuque terram obire, ac aera permeare visebantur. Posthac consecuta est maxima siccitas, ac repente ita graves terramotus facti, &c. Dio. Hist. l. 66.

Bloud

Bloud and fire

Audires ululatus fœminarum, infantûm quiritatus, clamores virorum, alii parentes, alii liberos, alii conjuges requirebant. Plin. de eodem Vesuv. Epist. l. 6. ep. 20.

And pillars of smoke.

Nubes ex ardente Vesuvio *oriebatur, cujus similitudinem & formam non alia magis arbor quàm pinus expresserat* [A tree much imitating a pillar in its shape and figure.] Idem l. 6. Ep. 16.

The Sun shall be turned into darkness, and the Moon into bloud.

Jam dies alibi, illic nox omnibus noctibus nigrior densiórque, quam tamen faces multæ, variáq; lumina solvebant, ep. 16. *Mox dies verus, Sol etiam effulsit, luridus tamen, qualis esse cùm deficit, solet. Nox, non qualis illunis & nebula, sed qualis in locis clausis, lumine extincto,* &c. ep. 20.

And there shall be signs in the Sun and in the Moon, upon earth distress of nations, Luk. 21. 25.

Tantus fuit cinis ut indè pervenerit in Africam, Syriam & Ægyptum, *introierítque* Romam, *ejúsque aerem compleverit, & Solem obscuraverit: nec mediocris etiam* Romæ *trepidatio complures ad dies accidit,* &c. *putare cœperunt omnia sursum deorsum ferri, Solémque in terram cadere, ac terram in cœlum ascendere.* Dion. lib. 66.

The sea and the waves roaring.

Mare in se resorberi & tremore terræ, quasi repelli videbatur. Plin. ep. 20.

Mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after the things which are coming on the earth.

Erant qui metu mortis, mortem precarentur; multi ad Deos manus tollere, plures nusquam Deos ullos, æternámque illam & novissimam noctem mundo interpretabantur: nec defuêre qui fictis mentitísque terroribus vera pericula augerent. Idem ep. 20.

The fitting of the comment of these Historians so closely and handsomly about the Text, offers an easy Apology, for our embracing this literal sense thereof, at least, till another shall be tendered with fairer probabilities. Especially considering the season to which our B. Saviour affixeth the fulfilling of this prediction seems to add some strength and confidence thereunto; now that was the time immediately succeeding to that wherein the black cloud of vengeance (charactered by the peculiar conditions and signs thereof, in the verses precedent) was to fall upon the Jewish Church and polity; as may appear from those words of his recorded by S. *Matthew*, Chap. 24. 29. *Immediately after the tribulation of those days, shall the sun be darkned,* &c. i. e. those days (spoken of before) wherein God had taken away the hedge about his formerly pleasant garden, the Jewish Church, and delivered it to the rage and malice of brutish men.

So that as the many false Christs arising, the earthquakes in divers places, the general hatred of men, the fearfull signs from heaven forementioned, seem given as the black tokens foreshewing *fa-*

ta Ecclesiæ Judaica, so this dreadfull occurrent (*Miraculum*, as *Pliny* calls it) seems given as a signe that was to forerun *fata Imperii Romani* (the other deadly enemy of Christianity) which from that time began to sink under its own weight, and to labour under great and grievous evils; and not to be accounted among the signs of the miseries approaching upon the Jewish State, (as some learned expositours contend) our Saviour having brought his discourse concerning that to an issue just before. And indeed, no signe seemed more proper then a burning mountain to give the Gentile world to understand that God would shew himself as severe a Judge upon the despisers of his Gospel, as he had before upon the despisers of his law, against whom at the promulgation thereof he proclaimed the

Deut. 4. 11. *terrours of the Lord in blackness and darkness, and that mountain which burnt with fire unto the midst of heaven.*

Notwithstanding what hath been said, I shall not receive this signe, and sense of these Texts, with more then the favour of a probability, both because I finde Expositours hovering but in the loose air of some general expressions upon them, and fearfull to strule down upon an assignation of the particular time and manner of their accomplishment; (amongst whom, commendable especially the modesty of *Calvin* who upon that Text in S. *Luke*, thus delivers his sense. *Quando sol obscurandus est, hodie conjicere non possumus, sed eventus ipse ostendet.*) And besides the fiery forces in that mountain, have in all likelihood sallied forth since upon men in as dreadfull and destructive a manner, as upon their first eruption.

Harm. in Luc. 21. 25. *Vid. Tract. cui tit.* Vesuvius ardens.

But lest I be thought to make too curious and unnecessary approaches to this mount of terrour, I shall set bounds to any further discourse about it, when I have added; that if upon the Readers further thoughts concerning it, it shall appear *more then probably* a signe of the time, it will also appear so appointed by God in those Scriptures forementioned; *if less*, nothing is lost but the courtesie conferred upon the conjecture; and so the credit of our present cause appears not at all prejudiced, which way soever the beam of his understanding (upon a due weighing of particulars) shall incline.

A second instance (in this order of Prodigies) which seems to enter a very probable plea for its reception, as an intended signe of an ensuing vengeance, is that *flaming sword* (as it seem'd) hanging over the city of *Jerusalem* for the space of a year together, before the Romane Eagles prey'd upon it. Our Saviour propheſied of

Luk. 21. 11. *some fearfull sights, and great signs from heaven*, as the forerunners of the desolation of that City; and perhaps upon a due judgement of the several circumstances of this heavenly *phænomenon*, it will appear great enough to fill out (in a good measure) that expression of our Saviours; For as that *Star* which was *cœli index* to the place of our Saviours birth, so this wonderfull appearance, declared by its peculiar and unusual accidents, that it was of no common make, nor came forth upon any mean and vulgar errand. It appears by the story to have descended so low in the air that it was evidently vertical

tical to the City, which had it been a true Comet it could not have done; and it lasted so long and maintained so fixt a position, that it cannot well be numbred among those *Idola Cometarum* in the Elementary region mentioned before, whose subtile and fluid matter serves them not to any such long continuance, at least not to so settled a posture of appearance.

And most fit it was that a Nation, long deaf to the voice of the many great signs from heaven to proclaim an approaching salvation, should receive some from thence of an approaching destruction. Amongst which none seem'd so proper as such a *flaming sword*, being a very expressive emblem of war and vengeance, and a kinde of imitation and remembrance of that *flaming sword*, which drove the first parents of that disobedient people (which rejected the Tree of life a type of *the Lord of life and glory*) from the *Paradise* of God. Rev. 22. 2.

They which endeavour to sink the price and value of this prodigious appearance in the air, beneath the esteem I receive it with, by laying beside it some other parallel examples thereof occurring in the Writers concerning Meteors, shall finde me no difficult Auditour of them, if they first fix the accomplishment of our Saviours Prophesie in some instance which may be more plausibly pretended a *fearfull sight and great signe from heaven.*

Thirdly, *None of the forementioned Prodigies, when ever occurring, are* [now] *to be received as the signs of any Future events.* An assertion which I thus build up. Propos. 3.

1 *We have no sufficient grounds and reasons to perswade our reception of them as such.* There are I know some men which can hang their most weighty principles (like the earth) *upon nothing.* Reasons and demonstrations are looked upon by them (where Religion appears concerned) as a kinde of cold and dull things, proper onely for Atheists or hereticks to measure their conceptions by: Objects hot and vehement, and that do not muth task and employ their faculties, [*as Pretended Oracles, Revelations, strong and inexplicable impressions upon their spirits, mighty Prodigies, some turgent imaginations, and traditional perswasions*] they use, (as silly birds in the night, to that which glares most) to fly about and admire. The discourses and practices of many men, speak them proselytes to that maxim of the old Heathens, viz. In doctrines concerning the Gods, or any matters Divine, we must never expect science and demonstration; but receive them how strange soever, with the religion of a very passive soul, and submissive faith. Job 26. 7. Οὐκέτι περὶ Θεῶν καὶ περὶ θείων δογμάτων ἐχων τὰ μαθήματα καὶ τὰς ἐπιστημονικὰς ἀποδείξεις. Jambl. Protrept. in Symb. 25.

But if we once put *Right Reason* (which is *ianitor Animæ*) thus by its office and place, our inward house will soon lie open and free for any vile and vagrant Opinion to take up and dwell therein. It is indeed the great maxim of those Sons of mystery, the Cabalists and some Chimists, that *Intellectus perficitur patiendo*, the minde of man (like matter) is rendred most capable of being well informed by becoming *pura potentia*, a passive power; and that truth offers her self solely to such passionate and humble suiters, which can be content even to forgo themselves to gain her. But sure I am God hath

no where required us to a faith which cannot ſatisfie the reaſon of a man which ſearcheth into the grounds and evidence thereof; He hath commanded us to *prove*, before we *hold faſt*, to chew before we ſwallow, to ſound as well as ſail. And therefore till we ſee ſome better reaſon offered to acquit our owning of them as the ſigns of Gods counſels, beſides the imaginations and dictats of dogmatical men (which will venture to break open Gods Cabinet, while they want any ſure key to unlock it) it is but a juſt reſpect to our ſelves, to maintain our freedom of diſſent, and to believe ſuch ſtrange works levelled to ſome other white, then what they imagine.

As for the ſeeming Reaſons which this Opinion leans unto, they will appear (like the *ſtaff of Egypt*) either to break under, or by an eaſy retorrion, to pierce and wound it. For whereas it is urged, that except we admit this end of theſe ſemi-miracles, the moſt quick-ſented will be at a fault, wholly at a loſs what end of them to aſſigne and pitch upon. I anſwer, Is it ſo great an inconvenience to admit of ſome paſſages in the book of the creature, of which we are not ſcholars good enough to make a right and proper conſtruction? Are there not ſome works of Providence which God hath made deep and myſtical, on ſet purpoſe, that man might be humbled by them into a ſenſe of his own ignorance and ſhortneſs? ſee Iſai. 48. 7. Eccles 7. 14. and is it a ſtrange thing to hear of ſome works in the compaſs of Nature, out of our reach, ſuch as we muſt behold (as children do the Moon) onely with an ignorant wonderment? *Yea, but the world will be alway ſurpriſed by judgements, if we admit not ſuch Prodigies the ſigns of them.* And hath not God told, even thoſe whoſe profeſſion it is to look after and expound the pretended ſigns of times [*the monethly Prognoſticatours*] *that deſolation ſhall come upon them ſuddenly and they ſhall not know?* And is not man expreſly ſaid *not to know his time, but to be ſnared in an evil time falling ſuddenly upon him?* Eccles 9. 12. In ſum, the great confidence of the Opinion we contend with, ſeems to lie (for ought I can perceive) but in a ſeries of many Aſſertours, which (like perſons in the dark) ſhut their eyes, and take care onely to hold faſt by thoſe which went before them.

Eccles 8. 17.

Iſai. 47. 11, 12, 13.

2. Theſe *Heteroclita Naturæ*, things which fall off from the rule and law of common and uſual Nature, miniſter to bigger ends then preſages. For

1. *They teach us to pay the tribute of admiration to him; who* (though by the miniſtery of ſecond cauſes) *doeth theſe great wonders.* Deliberate wondring (when the ſoul is not ſuddenly ſurpriſed) being raiſed up to an height, is, as one ſaith, part of adoration, and cannot be given to any creature without ſome ſacriledge. Such wondring conſiſts of Reverence and ignorance, which beſt becometh even the wiſeſt of men in their ſearches after God his ways. God hath his *wonders of juſtice*, ſuch wherein he cauſeth a ſtrange coincidence of blinde and contingent Agents, *συνεργεῖν to work together* for the detection and puniſhment of ſome great Criminals, that men may eaſily ſee that the *wheel brought over them* was *full of eyes*, conducted by ſome great *Intelligence*. He hath alſo his *wonders of mercy*, ſuch

ſuch wherein he walks, *in ways not caſt up*, to accompliſh the well-being and preſervation of thoſe which honour him by a great faith (ſuch whereof every pious breaſt is the *Office* wherein they are regiſtred and recorded.) To theſe, He hath been pleas'd to add his *wonders in Nature*; the commonneſs of his other works being apt to Soyl them, and to keep men from attending to all that Wiſdom and unſearchable Greatneſs diſplayed in them.

2. *Theſe things ſhew us all the creatures to be in Gods hand*, and eaſily commanded (like the clay in the hand of the Potter) to what figures and uſes, he ſhall think fit at any time to appoint them unto. According to that of *Job.* c. 9. 5, 6, 7. *Who removeth the mountains and they know not, which overturneth them in his anger. Which ſhaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Which commandeth the ſun and it riſeth not, and ſealeth up the ſtars.*

The other great Arguments againſt or for the obſervation, of any ſuch occaſions of wonder, as were laſt mention'd, as *Ominous*, being the ſame which fill out the foregoing papers, I ſhall not hear offer the Reader the *tædium* of any repetition.

CHAP. V.

Remedies adviſed againſt the Superſtition of Prodigies Signal.

Some men greatly propenſe to judge by meaſures vehement and extraordinary, and why. The evil of the common ſuperſtition of Prodigies further noted. 5 remedies advis'd againſt it. 1. The diſcarding of all jealouſies of God. *Theſe an eſpeciall occaſion of this ſuperſtition in the minds of the Gentiles.* 2. The avoiding of any great fears or hopes in reference to the future. *Theſe apt to make men regardfull of Prodigies and Prophecies, with the reaſon thereof.* 3. The ſtudy of natural philoſophy. *The nature of knowledge (in general) to fortifie againſt the fears of evil, the particular uſefulneſs of natural Philoſophy hereunto.* 4. A great indifferency of minde as to the iſſues of things in this world. *Perſons moſt in love with the world moſt ſollicitous to know its fortune; evidenc'd in the Jews and Gentiles.* 5. The diſcarding of that vulgar principle, That God gives us [now] ſigns of times. *That queſtion [whether there be any or no] anſwered in three concluſions. The vanity of attending to vulgar prophecies reprehended. An anſwer to* Luke 21. 11. *brought for proof of them. Why ſome ſigns of deſtruction given to the Jewiſh nation. Great changes in the world not eaſily foreſeen, and why. Times* hidden from men, *with the reaſon thereof, men greatly addicted to regard any pretenders to divination, the evil of propoſing of or attending to any* ſigns of times.

THere are a company of men in the world, whoſe melancholy fancies (like the *Cyclops* in the Poet) are perpetually imploy'd

as it were in framing thunder-bolts for heaven to throw down upon that world, themselves are fallen out withall. Never doth the face of heaven appear mantled up in clouds, but their timerous imagination moulds them into such antick figures that they seem a kinde of visible parables and dreadfull images of some approaching vengeance. There is scarce a night passeth them wherein they have not some terrible dreams, which tell them the fortune of no less then a kingdom: the souls of some persons scarce seem to come out of the same *limbus* with those of other men, so different the rules and measures by which their opinions and practices are layd out. In matters of a more sacred and religious reference, *Revelation, strong impressions of spirit, ecstacies, pretty allegories, parallels, Cabalisms*; in matters civil, some *old prophecy, mystick passages in Daniel*, and the *Apocalyps, new and impracticable Ideas of government, strange omens and prodigies*, (which, like bladders, shew bigger or less, according as an aery fancy swells and blows them up) are the great compass by which they steer their judgements.

But with what mean regards, shall scriptures, laws, sober counsels, and a prudential *Understanding of the times and what is fit to be done*, be entertained, if the light of knowledge, in matters sacred or civil, be once thought to shine most clearly into such crackt and crasy brains, as are, not seldom, the most curious attenders to such things as these? the true fears of religion, would be ready to flie away (like the spirits of over-heated liquours) if overacted by such strong and continued jealousies of heaven, as the observation of Prodigies (in the latitude contended for) would certainly subdue the minds of men unto. Besides, no man (that believes himself) shall ever be able to possess himself in peace while his inward house is haunted by such spirits of fear as a superstitious perswasion of prodigies will be alway raising up within him.

1 Chron. 11. 32.

I shall therefore, in order to a more perfect cure of so common and dangerous a distemper of minde, advise these ensuing remedies.

First, *The discarding of all sowre jealousies concerning God.* *Synesius* hath observ'd that howsoever the nations were distanc'd from each other (like the lines in the circumference) δόξαις ἐτερογνώμοσι, by very different Opinions and Sentiments in reference to God and religion, in other matters; yet still ἀγαθὸν τ θεὸν ὑμνοῦσιν ἅπαντες, ἅπαντα χῶ, κ᾽ σοφὸς δῆμος, κ᾽ ἄνοος, yet all center'd and met in this great doctrine (both wise and unwise) that God was a good, bountifull and benign Being: the greater wonder to me it is that so many Doctrines among the Heathens, and Christians too (which I am not hear to take notice of) should be receiv'd with a *non obstante* to this native and easy sense of the Divine Goodness and Philanthropy, lodg'd in their minds: That which my present argument leads me to observe is, how apt the minds of men are to be leaven'd with that sowre conceit (which cannot dwell with a belief of Gods goodness) which *Plutarch* justly challengeth in *Herodotus*, that τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἀθανερόν τ, κ᾽ πρόχωδες, the Deity is of an envious and troublesom disposition, that God is onely *ingeniosus in malis*, that his counsels are especially

In his disc. *de Regno.*

Περὶ τῆς Ἡροδότου κακοηθ.

especially taken up with the contrivances of new plagues and miseries for the hated world (then which did never a more pestilential air breath from the bottomless pit, ceazeing the very virals of religion, and corrupting the first and earliest notions rising up in the Soul when conceiving of a God) Hence grows this easy conclusion, that all Prodigies are a kinde of *Van-guard* to give notice of the many troops of furies and miseries marching after: so that hated man may not have so much as the aery hopes of good times to refresh his weary spirts with, nor be able to deceive his present pains so much as with a dream. Sure I am that the observation and expiation of all manner of Omens and prodigies among the Heathens, was a sowre fruit growing from this evil root especially, perpetual fears and unworthy jealousies of God.

Whereas, if men did not measure the Nature of God by that froward and envious spirit which commands themselves they might easily understand all the evils sometimes sent down upon the world, to be (in the language of the Moralist) onely λόγοι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς πεμπόμενοι, a divine testimony given in against sin; and intended but to discipline the mad world into some sober and wise thoughts: and they would believe the fairer reports which scripture makes of God, which tells us, *He doth not willingly grieve the children of men, that fury dwells not with him, that judgement is his strange work, &c.* And then would be easily perswaded that prodigies come forth upon some other errand, then to let them understand they must look to be speedily miserable. Did they once believe the Patience and long-suffering of God, they could not think he lets his creatures (as Moses did the tables) fall out of his hands, and break into disorder, as a discovery of his frequent anger and displeasure.

Secondly, *The avoiding of any great fears or hopes in reference to things future.* *Lucian* well notes that to a man big with any huge fears or hopes, a foreknowledge of events appears greatly necessary and desireable, (because this brings his distracted thoughts to a point) and therefore he is easily perswaded to attend to any prophecy or prodigie that offers him a promise of satisfaction and resolution. Besides where the soul is under the power of some great affection (as it alway is when sollicitous about the issue of things) any odd accident is apt to make a great impression upon it. Fear (like a crackt glass) represents every strange event in monstrous and frightfull figures to the minde, and will create its object where it cannot really finde it. Moreover, when men will usurp upon Gods province, and *curare futura*, he justly makes their sin their punishment, by delivering them to that anxiety which the observation of omens and prodigies tends to bring them in. 'Tis a great wisdom to attend the business of the day, and to leave the issue of affairs with infinite wisdom and goodness; and the rather, because if the event shall be prosperous, there will be time enough to enjoy our happiness when it shall be present we need not deflowr it by a precocious joy, before we are espous'd unto it) If adverse, what need we chew pils, and feel our evils twice over, once in fear, and again in presence? *sufficient*

Τῷ τε δεδιότι καὶ τῷ ἐλπίζοντι πρόγνωσις ἀναγκαιοτάτη τε καὶ πεδεινοτάτη. *In Phalarid.*

cient to each *day is the* present *evil thereof*, it need not borrow from to morrow.

Thirdly, *The study of natural philosophy.* Its the nature of all knowledge to give a kinde of strength and presence of minde to a man, but especially of *Philosophy*: this will secure us, as from the rocks of *Atheism* because leading us into a notice of some First cause, into which all the second doe gradually ascend and finally resolve; so also from the shelves of *superstition*, because acquainting us with the second causes: for fancy is apt to suggest very monstrous and superstitious notions of those things of whose causes and natures we are unresolv'd; all which flie (like the shadows of the twilight) before the approaching beams of knowledge. Philosophy leads us (as men doe horses) close up to the things we start at, and gives us a distinct and through view of what frighted us before, and so shames the follies and weakness of our former fears. He that knows what slow conquests a flame makes upon any humid viscous matter, will not easily account every gentle fire continuing for some time in the air, a kinde of flaming sword, miraculously appointed by God to drive the secure world out of its fools paradise. He that knows and considers how possible it is for springs sometimes to fail, (nay how wonderfull it is that they fail no oftner) cannot readily receive any casual breaches in the streams which hold of them, as presages of some civil breaches in a State, consequent thereunto. Besides, Philosophy informs us of the methods of nature, in reserving constancy and immutability to the *interiora cœli & terræ*, but banishing the great instances of variation to the superiour parts of Earth, and inferiour of Heaven: and accordingly to the earth-quakes, eruptions of strange fires, new fountains, preternatural generations (in all which, the more central and retir'd parts of this vast globe are not at all toucht and concern'd) there correspond in the *exteriora cœli*, mighty thunders, Comets, new stars appearing now and then, alterations in the figures of the Planets, variety of new spots observ'd to rise and set in the body of the sun, some (though rarer) failings of its usual splendour, &c. The orders and causes of Nature thus understood, would quickly chase away all those *Mormos* which fright men in the night of their ignorance.

Ea religio propaganda est, quæ conjuncta est cum cognitione Naturæ. Sic superstitionis stirpes omnes elidendæ sunt Tul. De Divin. l. 2.

Vid. Verulam. Cogit. de Nat. rer. 10.

Fourthly, *A generous indifferency and deadness of minde as to the good or evil things of this world.* The more the heart of a man outgrows the joys and fears of this world, the more will all things therein appear to him, much too little for the solemnity of a prodigy, the more will he think nothing here of value enough to have its fall come with pomp and observation, and the less will he concern himself to know the future condition of such a vanity as this world is. 'Tis only when mens hopes and fortunes are much embarked in this world that they are impressive to any great fears in reference to its future state. The *Gentiles* of old that could never lift up their heavy and drossy minds above the dull flats of things sensible and worldly, were the greatest Professours of all the arts of Divination by all manner of strange and unusual accidents. And the *Jews* (to whom God had promised

Tu in tantis erroribus es, ut existimes Deos mortium signa præmittere, & quidquam tam magnum ut perire mundus sciat? Senec. Nat. Quæst. l. 1. c. 1.

miſed a heaven on this ſide thereof in the liberal enjoyment of this worlds bleſſings) were very ſolicitous about the meaning of ſtrange Providences, the ſigns of the times, the iſſue of things; and God was pleaſed by many Oracles, ſigns and prophecies to accommodate himſelf to this low and wordly temper of theirs. But ſince the *introduction of a better hope*, the tenders of ſuch ſpiritual promiſes, we have ſcarce any intimations and notices given us of things future, unleſs ſome very dark prophecies in the Revelation, (which ſome learned men conceive already accompliſht) God hereby ſuppoſing, our eyes now to be fixt ſo upon the more clearly reveal'd felicities of another world, as not much to look down to the futurities of this.

Fifthly, *The diſcarding of that raſh principle*, that *God hath appointed ſome extraordinary ſigns of ſucceeding times.*

There are variety of times and ſeaſons, Καιροὶ πειρασμῦ. Luk. 8. 13. Καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως. Act. 3. 19. Καιροὶ ἐπισκοπῆς. Luk. 19. 44. there is in Divine diſpenſations a kinde of chequer-work of black and white days taking place by turns: σχῆμα τῦ κόσμυ, the ſcene of this world is thus ſhifted and varied, that both the various attributes of God, and the graces of his Spirit in his ſervants, may appear and act their parts by turns. Eccles 7. 14. 1 Cor. 7. 31.

Now men are very impreſſive to this perſwaſion, that as God (*in Nature*) hath ordained ſigns of ſeaſons enſuing [for when the *trees put forth*, we conclude that *ſummer is nigh*, and it *will be foul weather*, when *we ſee redneſs and lowring to* ſit upon the eye-lids of the morning] ſo that he hath (*in his Providence*) given us σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν, *ſigns of the times* approaching, ſome *tokens for good* or evil, whereby we may know what clothes to put on, whether we muſt prepare the garments of praiſe to entertain the joys, or clothe our ſelves with a great ſorrow and humility to prevent or prepare for the *evils which a few days may bring forth.* Mark 13. 28. Luke 16. 3.

Before they have ram'd this ground, they haſtily advance this concluſion, that Prodigies are a very great and proper *ſigne of the times*, becauſe every eye may eaſily foreſee an evil in ſuch *ſigns*, though the ſons of wiſdom alone are able to foreſee it in the probable *cauſes* thereof. But, that this is a very ſinking and deceitfull ground to ſtand upon will appear upon a brief reſolution of this Queſtion, [*Whether or no, now, under the times of the Goſpel, God vouchſafe particular Kingdoms any ſuch extraordinary ſigns of the times as are contended for?*] *Particular Kingdoms*, I ſay; for, as for thoſe ſigns ſome ſpeak ſo much of, of the *fall of Anti-chriſt*, *of the laſt times*, *of the binding and looſing of Satan*, *of the laſt judgement*, &c. they are all of a very catholick concern, and are ſo looſe and general, that (like the heavenly bodies) it is hard to determine their aſpects to any particular time and place, and if any ſuch ſigns do hereafter appear, they will ſerve rather as Arguments of Gods providence and preſcience, then as monitours of that juſt diſtance of time they have left thoſe Events behinde them, of which they are (at large) the forerunners: and ſo are wholly forein to our preſent enquiry.

In order to a more distinct answer to the Question proposed, I must necessarily premise this distinction of the supposed *signs of times*. There are 1. *Signa indicantia tantùm*, such signs as have no real and effective influence at all upon the Event succeeding, but serve as a kinde of *Bath Col*, onely as some softer voice from heaven to declare it to persons of more purged and attentive ears. *Such as are Prodigies of all sorts, the aspects of heaven, some old prophesies, plausible parallels, (in many instances) between the occurrences of former times and our own, some stated periods of time beyond which bodies politick have not been observed to continue without some gray hairs upon them,* (as the Prophet speaks) *some great decays, changes and alterations: some mystical prophecies or general promises in Scripture, forced by a strong and active fancy to the narrow sense and interest of some private times and occasions.* Many such kinde of signs there are, which (because I intend not to feed curiosity, but to starve it) I purposely omit. 2. There are other signs spoken of (of better name and credit) which we may style *signa operantia*, such signs as seem to carry their effects in the womb of their own powers and sufficiencies; having an influence upon them either in a *moral way* [as the *fulness of the iniquity of a Land*, upon the punishment there of,] or an *active* and *physical*, as the general bias and inclination of a people, the precipitate counsels of men in trust, and many such like which politick discourses, and the history of times may best lead us to the knowledge of.

Hos. 7. 9.

This premised, I shall return an answer to the question proposed in these three Conclusions;

First, *There are no such signa indicantia tantùm of any changes in States and times, as mention hath been made of.* None I say, that God ever appointed, or man may safely trust to. A truth which I shall presume evinc'd, if I can degrade *Prodigies, Prophecies, Heavenly aspects* from the honour of being Gods signs. Of all which I doubt not to say, that men may call upon their own fancies to divine unto them, and please themselves in the visions of their own heads; but neither Scripture nor solid reason warrant us now to receive any of the instances mentioned, as *Gods tokens* of some great plague, or mighty changes in a State suddenly to ensue.

First therefore, I assert *Prodigies* to be none of Gods designed tokens. The credit of this assertion I shall trust solely with the evidence of the precedent discourse: adding here onely, (because they are pretended the warnings of heaven) that it is not at all likely, that those men which will not be warned by those great examples of divine Justice extant in Sacred Writ, (in which they may see themselves executed *in effigie*) would ever learn wisdom from *Prodigies*, and those attested generally, but upon the faith of two or three ignorant spectatours: nor can it reasonably be presumed that those *strong holds* in the hearts of men, usually impregnable to all the batteries of sermons and afflictions, should ever yeeld upon the summons of any such supposed warning pieces (whose bullets fly so much over them) whose threatned evils stay in loose generals, and point not to any particular *persons*, or *time*, or *nature and condition* of the judge-

1 Cor. 10. 6.

judgement. So that as good men need no such warnings, so bad ones do not deserve them, so little use would they in all probability make of them, if they were afforded. More sober therefore, and advised the Doctrine couch'd in those Ethnick fables, in which the Poets feign *Nemesis* (Divine Vengeance) the Daughter of *Oceanus* and *Nox*, the strange vicissitude and revolution of affairs in this work, and the dark and inscrutable counsels of heaven; and the *Parcæ* to have had their habitation in a deep cave, whence they oft issued forth suddenly upon the secure and unwary world.

2. *Vulgar Prophecies* are not to be received as any *signs of future times.* It was the Opinion of some of the *Jews*, and most of the *Gentile Philosophers* of old, that the soul came down into the body, pregnant with a δαιμονίαν μαντικὴν, καὶ προγνωστικὴν, a prophetick and prognostick power, which it could here not exert and feel, being now *blinde and unable to see afar off*, because of a veil of flesh and a thick mist of fantasms cast before its eye in this embodied state. A Doctrine, which the carriage and demeanour of the soul, while a prisoner to its own house, seems a little to encourage; for as the bush in the fable, having sustained a great loss of cloth, stands ever since by the highway and catcheth hold of every mans clothes, in hopes to repair its own losses; so the souls of men seem to express a tacit sense of a great loss in regard of the knowledge of things future, in that they stand (as were) *in triviis*, and hastily catch at any pretending Prophecy and shadow of Divination: and indeed I have *nothing* (in this matter) more *to accuse my own Nation* then others of; it being an argument of the blindness of most ages and Nations, that they readily swallow down such flies as these, when tendred to them. *Vid.* Plut. *de defect. Orac.*

This branch of superstition not dropping much upon our grounds, it may suffice to strike at it but with this one consideration: *Such Prophecies evidently appear no signe of the times, because not coming forth from God who alone is able to declare the end from the beginning:* * For they are often found (like lines drawn by no rule) to cross and thwart one another; * they are generally observed to abuse mens minds with vain hopes and pannick fears; * the style they are generally delivered in wears the Devils livery, being full of darkness and perplexity. * They engage the minde to attend to hurtfull curiosities, and difficult impertinencies; * they are not all levelled (what was noted of old of all the Devils predictions) εἰς τὸ ἐπιστρεπτὸν, καὶ σωτήριον καὶ ἐπανορθωτικὸν ἀνθρώπων, to the bettering and correction of mens lives and manners. * God is never own'd in them as the Authour of the evils foretold, nor repentance as the remedy; * the persons which deliver them are generally very ignorant, vitious, or hypochondriacal; * they frequently betray men (by some doubtfull expression) to the evils they seem to warn them of, * they come forth commonly and are most attended to, in times of action and expectation. Origen. *l.* 7. *contr.* Cels. *p.* 335.

The Devil then must be acknowledged the Authour of most of these vulgar Prophecies; and will any man that owns Christ for his Prophet, receive the Devil for his Oracle? or when he is sick of the

present times, go to the *God of Ekron* (by attending to any such Prophecies) for quiet and resolution? Shall we value our faith at so cheap a rate, as to trust it with the Oracles of the Father of lies? Can the Devil be presumed *able* to give us true resolutions to any questions *de Futuro?* (did God ever make him of his counsel, or deliver times and seasons into his power?) or *willing* (if able) to do it with any fair and single purposes and intentions? Have the beams of the *Sun of Righteousness* put out all the fires on his Altars, the glory and power of the Divine Oracles and miracles, spoiled his great trade of *Oracles and lying wonders*, and shall our easiness and vanity encourage him to drive this more secret and little trade of Prodigies and Prophecies?

3. We are next in the third place, to evince the *various aspects of heaven*, no intended *signs of times*; but because the contrary events of things, do so often *make*, or prove *the Diviners by* them, *mad*; and because the greatest and most wonderfull change in State, that ever happened (by the restauration of His Majesty in peace and honour) was not so much as dreamed of by all the Privy-Counsellers to the stars; and for that my work hath been lately so happily taken out of my hand, and the subject scarce comes within the suburbs of my present Argument; I shall pass this third particular: though conceiving the interposal thereof necessary, to serve the order and method of the Readers thoughts and meditations in this matter.

Dr. *H. More* Myst. Godl. l. 7. c. 14, 15, 16.

As for the Arguments drawn from those *fearfull sights and great signs from heaven*, mentioned Luke 21. 11. precedent to the destruction of *Jerusalem* and the Jewish polity; to encourage the expectation of any such *signs of times* now, or the advancement of Prodigies into the repute of any divine Monitors, they will appear to be greatly inconsequent, if we consider,

1. *All those accidents were foretold and particularly appointed by God as signs.* Particularly, the opening of the gates of the temple (some time before its desolation) of their own accord, though of such massy brass, that they could not be shut or opened (if we credit *Josephus*) without the twisted strength of twenty men, and though secured with great bars of iron, is thought by some learned Jewish and Christian Expositours, the accomplishment of the prophecy of *Zechariah*, chap. 11. vers. 1. *Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars*: Where by *Lebanon*, they understand the Temple, built especially of the cedars there growing, as it is elsewhere in the Prophets, used to signifie. And *Munster* upon the place tells us that one of the Jewish Doctours upon occasion thereof, thus rebukes the Temple, *Ego cognosco imminere tui desolationem, juxta vaticinium Zechariæ, qui dixit, Aperi Libane portas tuas.* But what pattent can be shewed from the Book of God, whereby any, much less all, the forementioned Prodigies, hold the place and honour of Divine signs?

Ezek. 17. 3. Hab. 2. 17. *where the Chald. Par. instead of Lebanon reads* בית מקדשא *the house of the sanctuary.* Ἰωσηπ. ἁλωσ. λο. ϛ. κεφ. λα. Matth. 24. 21. Dan. 12. 1.

2. *The miseries foretold by those signs, were great without example.* *Josephus* calls them evils τῶν σημείων ἀξια, worthy of some signs. They came not forth as the Heraulds of some petty war, or to precede

the

the funerals of some great Personage, but (as it is called) *a great tribulation, such as was not since the world began nor ever shall be*;

Exemplóque carens, & nulli cognitus ævo
Luctus erat.

3. *The destruction of Jerusalem was a type and picture of the final destruction of the world.* And therefore fit it was that the terrours of the latter, should be a little pattern'd and shadowed out in the fearfull sights and Prodigies attending the former; besides, the consternations of soul, and failings of heart which these foregoing signs wrought in some men, before the *decree brake forth*, made the destruction of *Jerusalem* (in all the circumstances thereof) the more lively type not onely of the terrours of the last judgement, but of those horrours and sinkings of spirit in bad men which shall go before it.

4. *Our Blessed Saviours extraordinary prediction of those Prodigies as his signs to that generation, seems rather to assure them not intended the common fore-runners of any great plagues and wars*, and that no good *crisis* can be ordinarily made of the future condition of a state by a regard to any such in themselves doubtfull and unfaithfull indications. For what need of predictions, if these signs were to fall out by a kind of common rule and law of providence? and how unnecessary had it been to appoint such accidents for signs of evil, which draw after them a *series* of evils with so great a constancy, that they seem (without a Prophet) to appoint themselves the signs of the times?

5. *The condition of those times seem'd especially to require some such signs.* For, 1. They serv'd then as mercifull warnings to Christs followers, to hasten their escape from that house (that City) which was ready to fall upon them and involve them in its ruins. Mat. 24. 16. 2. The Jews requir'd signs from heaven, and God would not be wanting to any probable means and motives of their repentance. 3. The Jewish oeconomy commenc'd in fearfull sights at mount *Sinai*, *and great signs* from heaven; and fit it was its conclusion should somewhat resemble the solemnity of its beginning. 4. The many signs given by our Saviour serv'd gradually to wean the hearts of his followers from *Hierusalem* (once the *light of their eyes*) of whose determin'd desolation, these gave them such full and repeated assurances.

Secondly, *We cannot receive any Signa Operantia, as the faithfull and unquestionable intelligencers of the condition of succeeding times*; as the unquestionable intelligencers, I say, and that, Conclus. 2.

1. Because *God often acts secondary Agents to secret and unknown ends.* He acts sometimes without, but usually beyond them, and hath oftentimes ends to serve upon their motions and counsels, which they reach no more then a beast doth the intention of its Rider. Mic. 4. 11. Is. 10. 7.

2. *Because God often accomplisheth his biggest ends by means unpromiseing and almost invisible.* He frequently rows his purposes to harbour, while the means seem to look quite another way: what is observ'd of the methods of God in *Nature*, holds true generally in the methods of his *Providence*. The greatest works are perform'd by the Is. 60. 22. 1 Cor. 1. 28.

Omnis actio naturalis per minima transigitur, aut saltem per illa, quæ sunt minora quàm ut sensum seriant. Bac. Org. l. 2. Sec. 7.

least and most insensible Agents. We shall finde great kingdoms in History, commencing (like a great snow-ball) from a handfull, increasing to a greatness (in the eye of sense) immoveable, and at last concluding in soyl and dirt. But especially observable is this usage of Providence in the management of the affairs of the Church, which (like Christ the head thereof) springs as *a root out of a dry ground*, and was never any great gainer by the wars and arms of Princes.

Zech. 4. 6. Mat. 13. 36.

3. *God sometimes makes use of means great and pompous to some ends weak and little in the eye of sense.* To what great actions all on the suddein, did he strengthen the hands of the *King of Sweden*? his victories drew the eyes of the world upon him, and 'twas concluded by some, that Providence design'd him the *Apocalyptick Angel* which should pour out one of the *Vials* upon the Beast, when behold, unexpectedly the current of his successes runs under ground, and men engag'd to conclude God had ends more secret and spiritual to accomplish by him, then they imagin'd.

Ezra. 4. 24. Rev. 12. 1. v. 2.

4. *God usually advanceth his great works and ends, by pauses and periods.* Providence (in the advancement of the church) hath usually its *fines abruptos*. God in the works of Nature doth *compendium facere*, goe the neareſt way to his ends; but in the works of providence he doth *circulum describere*, goe about, and his work advanceth by such slow and silent progresses; that in the issue, it seems to any but a prudent and severe observer, the issue of time and chance, rather then any steady and well advis'd understanding.

5. *God hath an unknown variety of means and methods to accomplish his purposes by.* He works by any means, by weak, by contrary, by none. He sometimes brings his greatest ends to birth by the midwifry of seeming casualties, and little emergencies, which taken asunder are weak and common, but viewed in consort speak excellent art and counsel: the observation whereof drew forth that Christian speech of *Machiavel in* an Ethnick dress, *Fatorum viæ & rationes producendorum effectuum, obscuriores sunt quàm ut à nobis intelligi queant.* Upon these and many more accounts (out of the lines of our present Argument) the fairest promises of these active signs, may quickly prove lies to us and abuse our trust. As for that *Moral signe*, so much talkt of [*The fulness of the iniquity of a land*] 'tis to intrude into Gods counsels to determine when it is, the *Ephah* stands by him alone, and he onely knows how near it is to filling.

Object. Chap. 24.

But possibly, it will here be objected in the words of *Job*. *Why seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, doe they that know him, not see his days?* i. e. why at least doe not wise and good men (styl'd the persons which *know God*, in scripture) see the times of great mercies or judgements (usually call'd *Gods days*, as was noted before) when as yet at distance, and approaching?

Sol.

I answer, Even good men (like men in a mist) though they can see their way, yet cannot see far before them for very good reasons. 1 That so the knowledge of the good or evil of the time to come, might not disturb the duty of the time present. 2. The knowledge

of

of Gods counsels is the prerogative onely of our Saviour, He is *Palmoni*, the *great numberer of secrets*, Dan. 8. 13. It is honour great enough for us to be *filii thalami* to the King of heaven, he onely must be *socius consilii*. 3. God will hereby teach us to walk by the rule of his word, not the issue of things. 4. That so we might honour him with a great faith, following of him, as it were, like *Abraham*, not *knowing whither we goe*. 'Tis a sign we dare venture our selves with our Pilots skill and integrity, when we sleep securely, not knowing particularly what course he steers. 5. That so, not knowing in what time or manner, *our Master will come unto us, we might be always watching*. 6. It is a curious and unnecessary knowledge. God hath so appointed it, that *ad minimè necessaria minimum lucis acciperemus*. Scripture acquaints us not with the figures of our Saviours person, nor the usages of his life before his publick ministry, nor the methods of the Divine Decrees, nor the orders of the Angelical hierarchy, and multitudes of questions referring to the future state, and the accomplishment of Prophecies, it remits to the solution of our great *Elias* at his second coming. God is pleased to recommend to us the plainness of his precepts which we must know, by the obscurity of his Providences which we need not; so unnecessary the knowledge of things future, that some of the Ancients conceive, that therefore God gave the People of the Jews their Oracles and Prophets which were to inform them even in matters of a worldly concern [as the success of a battel, recovery from a fit of sickness, the condition of other kingdoms in after times, &c.] because else in all likelyhood they would have apostatiz'd from the true God to the rites of the Gentiles [who had their *Oracles*, *Auguries*, *Diviners*, *Soothsayers*] ὑπ' ἀλλης ἐν τ ἀνθρωπίνης περὶ τὴν γνῶσιν λειχνείας τῆς ἐσομένων ἀγόμενοι, being prompted thereunto by that natural liquorousness in the minds of men after the knowledge of things wrapt up in futurity. So unnecessary did our Saviour seem to judge this knowledge, that his prophecies (if all put together) would not much exceed the writings of the least of the minor Prophets, though himself the Great Prophet of his Church.

Mar. 13. 35. Orig. Cont. Celf. l. 1. p. 28. & l. 3. p. 113. Deut. 18. 14, 15.

Thirdly, *There are some effective signs of Events, upon a view whereof a very probable judgement may be sometimes made by a wise person of the issue of affairs*. Sometimes indeed second causes, which seem most pregnant with such effects, shall have miscarrying wombs, and all the εὐσύμβολα πολλὰ (in the phrase of the *Philosopher*) the most probable counsels of the great *Oracles* of state, which own no providence nor power Superiour to their own, shall *be turned into foolishness*, to give the world arguments of a Divine providence concern'd in the affairs of men. But yet oft times God permits things (as trees doe) to fall that way to which (in the judgement of prudence) they seem to incline; that so, humane foresight and prudence (the image of Providence) may appear valuable to men, and the wise man and the fool may not be thought to stand upon a level, and all things to run upon a die. Concluſ. 3.

It is a pregnant argument that wisdom was never very friendly to the

the world, that it hath been so prone in all times to receive pretended divination and prescience, with more sacred regards then laws and wise men; and yet at the same time have given the glory of the gift thereof to the weakest understandings. *Madmen, Persons transported by the heats of a feaver, their prophets when in a fury, Star-gazers, Fortune-tellers, Women,* (for such were the Sibylline Oracles deliver'd by) *critical observers of omens and prodigies, persons that declaim hotly against* (what they understand not) *humane learning,* and such as (like old men) see and know least of things near and present, have been often thought to see things at some distance and in futurity, most exactly and distinctly.

Τὸ βακχεύσιμον καὶ μανικὸν δεῖσθαι μαντικῆς πολλοὺς ἔχει ὅταν δὲ ἐνθεσιασθῇ ἡ ψυχὴ ψυσμοῦται καὶ πυρώδης, &c. Plut. de def. Orac.

But we shall finde God in Scripture so far securing the honour of true Divination, as to confer the gift thereof (generally) upon men, and those of a pious and learned education, and all the shadows thereof which may be yet found in the world *Solomon* tells us dwell in a wise and understanding Soul [Prov. 22. 3. *A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself*; and that not by consulting of Prodigies, but observing the seeds and causes in which it lies hid.] As all other gifts and abilities, once miraculous and extraordinary, *those of healing, of speaking with tongues, of interpreting the Scriptures, of discerning of Spirits,* so this also of *foreseeing events future* (so far as they remain yet in the world) are reserv'd solely as the reward and honour of the diligent, observant, and understanding person.

To dismiss this particular: *Times and Seasons* are especially *reserv'd in Gods power,* and 'tis our wisdom to study rather how we may *redeem the* present *time,* then understand the future. As for that threed-bare Argument therefore (*Signs of future times*) I could wish it might be worn no longer in writings and discourses, not onely because things shew of colour, but according to the light men stand in, but because the men whom they are designed to deterr from any course of sin, start at them possibly at first, (as birds doe at the images of a man in the fields) but afterward sit down upon them and neglect them, perceiving (in the issue of things) that they are devoyd of [life and motion] truth and certainty: and so these false fears in religion may chance to discredit the true, as the adventitious heat in bodies oft-times supplants and betrays the natural: besides, all such signs of times doe but tender the short and narrow thoughts of man, as the standard of Gods: and tend to detain people always in a gazing and expecting posture, so that they compose not to the work and duty of the day. And to encourage rash and unwarrantable purposes, and therefore perhaps the wisdom of the State may in time see reason to interdict the publication of prodigies and Astrological predictions, under as severe a penalty as it hath old prophecies; all being but the *ignes fatui* leading to the boggs of sedition, by amuzing men with a false light, (the pretended knowledge of the *signs and state of future times.*)

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

Concerning Prodigies Penal.

HAving thus (in a method as much required to the rules of Logick, as the uncertain and doubtfull colour and condition of the Subject would allow) discourſed the firſt part of my Argument, [*Prodigies barely ſignal*] that which the order propos'd lays next before us, is the conſideration of *Prodigies penal*. By which I underſtand [*pœnarum monſtra*] judgements of an unuſual make and more dreadfull aſpect. Now theſe are either *Perſonal*, befalling ſome particular members of the common body, who (to uſe the ſignificant language of Scripture) *have not died the common death of all men, nor been viſited after the viſitation of all men*; Numb. 16. 24. or *National*, when the whole body of a Nation, or the greater part thereof, is ſmitten with a rod of an unuſual ſize. Theſe alſo may eaſily be conceived by men as a kinde of hand out of the clouds to write *Tekel* upon perſons or cauſes diſtaſtfull to themſelves, and therefore I ſhall (as I can) direct to a ſober notion concerning them both in theſe five Concluſions.

SECT. I.

Prodigies Penal how to be interpreted.

Two concluſions here laid down to direct to a right notion in reference to judgements extraordinary. Theſe without other proof, no ſafe ſigns of the extraordinary ſinfulneſs of Perſons. *Men apt to think them ſo and why. Nor yet* of cauſes: *proved by ſeveral conſiderations. Eminent judgements upon eminent ſinners to be greatly heeded. A judgement ſignal and remarkable in three caſes eſpecially. Two miſcarriages to be avoided in the obſervation of the puniſhments upon our Neighbour.*

OUr firſt Concluſion is this. *Judgements Extraordinary, are not (without further evidence) concluding Arguments of the extraordinary ſinfulneſs of Perſons or cauſes.* Concluſ. 1.

First, *Not of the extraordinary ſinfulneſs of Perſons.* Men are generally prone to finde their own vertues in *Fortunæ blanditiis* (to weigh their own merits at the falſe beam of outward bleſſings and ſucceſſes) and their brothers faults *in Parcarum tabulis*, the ſad deſtinies and evils which lie upon his lot. *Jobs* friends judged the dimenſions of his iniquity by the ſhadow of the ſufferings which were laid upon him, and concluded the former great becauſe the latter were ſo. Job 2. 13. *Shimei* concluded *David* to be a man of bloud, *becauſe evil was raiſed up to him out of his own houſe*, 1 Sam. 16. 8. The *Diſciples* that the man or his parents had greatly ſinned becauſe he was born blinde, Joh. 9.

2, 3. The *Barbarians*, that the Apostle was deeply indebted to divine Justice, when his hand was arrested by the viper, Acts 28. 4. The Disciples that those were the greatest sinners in *Jerusalem* upon whom the towre of *Siloam* fell, and became both their monument and executioner, Luke 13. 4. Thus among the *Heathens* of old, if a person were struck dead by lightning, they presently conceived his crimes as black as his smitten body, and look'd upon him as judged by heaven it self, good for nothing but to make an example of to the rest of men. And the Oratour vainly inferr'd God had no great love for his children of old (the Jewish Nation) because he severely corrected them so often. And many amongst our selves, if the *fire of God* fall and consume their neighbours dwelling, if he fill not up the *number of his days*, nor be *gathered to his grave in peace*, are apt to hasten to a rash sentence, and to write in his ashes, [*Forsaken of God.*]

Vid. Casaub. in Pers. Sat. 2.

Quàm chara Diis immortalibus esset [*Gens Judæorum*] *docuit quod est victa, quod elocata, quod servata toties.* Or. pro Flac.

Now such hasty conceits as these, rise up in our minds, partly from a peasantly notion of good and evil in us, we are apt to overrate our bodies and estates, and then to estimate the favour of God by the references and aspects his Providences bear towards them. Besides we conclude (the great rule of justice being this, that all punishments be adjusted to the merits of the person) that all punishments extraordinary, are the most proper indications of a correspondent guilt.

Whereas Gods distributions of rewards and punishments in this life, are not directed by any of our short and scanty maxims and notions. He often puts that metall into the hottest fire, which he intends shall bear his own image in most lively figures. He hath priviledged his servants from some sin, but from no punishment. *Josiah* may fall in a battel, *Uzzah* be suddenly smitten for an errour of love and zeal, a daughter of *Abraham* be bound by *Satan*, a *Job* delivered to the power of Satan both in body and estate. A person may (like the leper under the law) be smitten with a very black and dark plague and yet be pronounced clean before men. Look as in some Prodigies *signal*, things seem so delivered to the powers and forces of secondary Agents, that the world appears but a kinde of great Engine moved solely by certain weights and springs within it self, and all effects resolvable into bare and single *Nature*; so in Prodigies *penal*, Gods arrows seem so to fly by dark, and heavy plagues to fall with so little choice and distinction, that the world seems a great lottery, *and time and chance to happen to all* events and persons. God (perhaps intending this cryptick management of affairs, as a kinde of Divine tentation, to prove whether we be such men in understanding as to stand by the doctrine of a Providence, while the necessity, power, and wisdom thereof are rendred so much to dispute by the great appearances of Nature and Fortune, and whether we be quick-sighted enough to discover that the *living creatures* have the *hands of a man*, though half *hidden under* the covert of *their wings*, that all causes and events are managed by a hand of Wisdom and reason, though they may seem to fly at random, to our first and more unwary thoughts.

Eccles 8. 14. chap. 9. 1, 2. Levit. 13. 6. Ezek. 1. 8.

Excel-

Excellent therefore the advice of *Solomon*, who having told us that *there is a just man who perisheth in his righteousness, and a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness*, thus directs in the following words [*Be not righteous over-much, neither make thy self over-wise*] i. e. Do not in thy fond thoughts acquit thy self more righteous then the person upon whom thou seest such a judgement fall; *neither make thy self over-wise* by arrogating an understanding sufficient to expound this riddle of Providence [Gods dealing out such hard measure to such a person] It is a rashness to say the tree was rotten, because we see it blasted. If it be but πειρασμὸς ἀνθρώπινος (in the phrase of the Apostle) such an affliction as some man hath suffered, and any may, let us not by any censorious speeches poison our brothers wounds, which call for the oyl of our comforts and prayers. When we read that *Antioch* (where the Disciples were first called Christians) and the Churches of the *Colossians* and *Laodicea* (to which the Holy Ghost directed particular letters by the hands of S. *Paul*, and S. *John*) perished by an earthquake; of Gods forsaking the *Levantine Churches*, of the seas sudden breaking of its sandy girdle, and overwhelming Cities or Countreys, of the many thousands which perished upon the second terrible eruption of fire from mount *Vesuvius*, or the like judgements great enough for an *Epocha*, we are not to afflict their miseries, by charging a greater guilt upon their persons and memories then on other men; but rather (with the Apostle) *Stand and behold the severity of God upon them which fell*, and adore his *goodness* to us who are not thus surprised in our wickedness, or visited with some strange affliction which might make us infamous as well as miserable, and encourage uncharitable men *to clap their hands at us, and to hiss us out of our places.*

Eccles 7.15. 1 Cor. 10. 3. *Anno* 1631. Job 27. 23.

Secondly, *Neither are any such extraordinary judgements* (in destitution of any other evidence) *to be received as conclusive arguments of the sinfulness of causes (civil or sacred.)* Doctrines and causes change colour and appearance in the eye of the multitude, according as heaven shines more or less upon them by successes. Our histories make mention of a very hot contest about the marriage of Priests, whether were more acceptable with God, they which vowed single life, or they which were married. At last the Contenders agreed to remit the controversy to the debate of a Synod, where they which asserted the marriage of Priests, placed themselves on one side of the room, and they which appear'd against it, on the other: and so it happened that the side of the house, whereon the defendants of the marriage of Clergy-men sat, fell down, and many of them were hurt, and many lost their lives. Which accident was construed Gods determination in the dispute, and received as a signe that he was better pleased with those which vowed single life; and the arguments of their adversaries were hereby, long after knock'd at head, as well as themselves. *Baronius* (to inferr the piety of that paiment) takes notice that the Church of *England* was even overspread with schisms and heresies, *simul ac denarium Petri solvere desierunt*, as soon as ever the people left off to pay Peter pence. And of late, *si quid humanius*

The Late Church Hist. l. 2. p. 133.

In Annal. circa An. 740.

manitùs acciderit, any distemper incident to humanity, have befallen persons in attendance on the publick Service, they have been rashly urged as caveats from heaven against the very prayers. And thus (in common life) where men are at variance, and see the *rod of God* lying upon the back of their adversaries, they are ready to say, God hath espoused their cause and avenged their quarrel; and so, to kill their brother with Gods sword, and make him a party in all their petty quarrels and animosities.

Against all such unclean proofs, which (like the Crab) go backward, from events to rules, I offer these considerations,

1. As God *in his word*, hath recorded some actions of very eminent persons [as the equivocating of *Abraham* with *Abimelech*, *Rachel* her defeating of *Laban* with a falshood, some actions of *Samson*, &c.] not noted (like the Jewish Sepulchres) with any visible signe of reproof and dislike, that so men might not unwittingly defile themselves by copying out the example (in which he doth but prove our constancy to his even and undoubted precepts, and try whether we have understanding to put a difference between the bright and darker side of that *cloud of witnesses* we are to eye in our way to heaven) so also *in his providence* there are *tentationes divinæ*; God often blasts the cause of truth and goodness by adverse providences, the cloud often rests upon the *tabernacles of the Righteous*, the fire of heaven sometimes strikes a religious house, the chief witnesses of truth shall be forc'd to know themselves by the title of *Victus Dei populus*, God hereby makes trial whether we will believe the *Spirit of the living creature* to move *in the wheels*, whilst they describe such involv'd and perplex'd circles and motions; whether we love truth and vertue, or rather their fortunes and felicities. Besides, the divine relation, and light of righteousness and truth, never make such clear reports of themselves, as when they break out and shine forth at last, through all the clouds of persecution and heresies, God often permits them for a time to be obscured withall.

2. Prodigious evils upon its Adversaries, is a plea which almost any cause is able to enter for it self at one time or other. The Israelites fell twice before the *Benjamites* though engag'd in a war (seldom unprosperous) intended onely *ut vindicta publica*. We finde the Heathens often mentioning the judgements which befell the *contemptores Deorum & religionis*, among them. And *Herodotus* tells us that several Barbarians (as he styles them) adventuring to rush rudely upon the Temple of *Minerva*, had the irreligion of the attempt aveng'd upon them by a fire from heaven. An event to which I incline to intitle the especial agency of the Devil (amongst whose stranger works, the *causing of fire to come down from heaven*, is especially instanc'd in Rev. 13. 13.) to maintain thereby a reverence in the minds of men to his altars and rites, and perhaps to imitate the fire which came forth from God, under the old law, to avenge the irreverend and unhallowed approaches to his altars; or which fell from heaven to chastise the rude and violent addresses of the

Judg. 10. 10.

Vid. Val. Max. Cap. *de Contempt. Relig.*

Herodot. l. 8. c. 37.

the Captains and their fifties to a *Man of God*. However neither of these two examples (for I must rather croud then leave out instances, they are so many) will encourage any man to acquit the *Benjamites*, or to bless an Idol.

3. God hath supply'd us with more even and steady rules to estimate the straightness or crookedness of any cause by, then *Prodigies penal*, which an active fancy may easily tune to the air of any opinion and practice whatsoever. We have the Oracles of God, the counsels of wise and good men, the common principles which manage the discourses of the world, the laws of a State, and our own exercised reason, which is (in the language of *Plutarch*) τῆς ἀκριβείας κριτὴς, the great Oracle of truth to resolve us in the emergent doubts of life. And it is especially because men are under a quick sense, how exact an eye is requisite to discern how nearly any of these rules touch the building (any cause or doctrine) of whose evenness there may be a doubt; and that this method of knowledge engageth them to *dig for understanding*, and requires them to an industrious use of themselves, in the acquist of true resolutions in a case, and perhaps may detain them some time but in the place of candidates and Probationers for truth, that they are so easily inclin'd to attend to the (supposed) intimations of a *Revelation*, some *strange prodigy*, or *prophecy*, *a mighty impulse*, which give them the conclusion without tasking them to a tedious consideration of the value of the premises, and lift them up into the *Tree of knowledge*, without any industrious climbing of their own. But certainly God who bade us *buy the truth*, never intended it should be got upon such cheap and easy terms; men may suspect their wares to be nought, if they cost no more then an idle attendance to such fantastical measures as these generally are.

4. Gods particular judgements, as to the special ends and intendments of them, are generally inscrutable. We commonly set so high a price upon our causes, parties, and opinions, that we easily imagine, the biggest end, Gods judgements can be directed to, is the bearing witness to the truth and righteousness of them. By which fancy, we become a kinde of spiritual *Anthropomorphits*, shaping out a God like our selves, and laying out the counsels of heaven by the poor, short, (and often peevish) thoughts and models of a man. If we consult Scripture we shall seldom or never finde a person onely of a corrupt judgement in reference to some Doctrine of religion (if otherwise of a blameless life) smitten with any great plague from heaven, but often, persons of corrupt and depraved manners: because all the laws of righteousness carry οἰκεῖον ἔλεγχον, a demonstration within themselves, and stand in so full a light, that (like the Sun beams) they bear testimony to themselves. Whereas matters of faith and doctrine appear not before the minde in so great an evidence. Men indeed are apt to follow a little difference of Opinion from themselves (in religion especially) with thick *Anathemas*, and quickly to blow it out into a schism or heresy (because such differences seem to dispute the strength of their Arguments)

gumeurs) but are eâsily inclin'd to look upon even a great miscarriage in life, through the other end of the prospective, and to shrink it to a *Nullity*; a poor humane infirmity, (Gods honour onely being concerned in that) Whereas on the other side, Divine goodness makes a large allowance for a well-meant errour, (because the understanding, like the eye, cannot so easily see its own blemishes) but is severe against even a little crime, men being more enabled for a discovery of that.

To say therefore, that *Arius* (who in the manner of his death seem'd the Antitype of *Judas*, his bowels gushing out when he went to serve the necessities of Nature) proclaim'd the displeasure of God against his doctrine; or that that house in *Black-Fryers*, which sunk down under the weight of those many Papists there assembled with their Priest to attend the offices of their Religion, and buried them in its ruines, was Gods warning against Popery; or that the births (though granted monstrous beyond the possibilities of Nature) which M^r^ *Hutchinson* and M^rs^ *Dyer* (the two great Prophetesses & Leaders to the Anabaptistical faction in *New-England*) were delivered of, singled out their Opinion, and were visible reproofs from heaven of *Anabaptism* it self, is to interpret the voice of Gods rods by blinde and uncertain ghesses, and to repeat the vanity of that Emperour who would fetter the sea; for we hereby determine the large and deep thoughts of infinite Wisdom by those little maxims, short thoughts and ends, our selves usually attend unto. God never menac'd any such reproachfull judgement against any such errours as these, in Scripture; and if he had, if found in conjunction with great crimes, it may be more reasonably presum'd, that it was directed rather against the wickedness of the heart then the weakness of the head.

See the Story at large in Gouge *his three Arrows.*

If I would advise with my eyes in the choice of my party or Opinion, I should rather observe (as I could) what parties of men are most delivered to the judgement of a cruel and unquiet spirit, to a giddy motion from one fond notion to another, who they are which seem most forsaken of vertue and true goodness. For these are spiritual judgements, and so, more suitable to the condition of that spiritual Oeconomy, the appearance of our Saviour hath now put us under. Besides, the Spirit of truth may (nay, usually doth) dwell with great sufferings, but great sins give suspicion of its departure. But even this also, upon trial will approve it self but the best of bad rules to proceed by in the trial of causes: for the enormity of mens lives (like dirty hands) may foyl and blemish the jewel of a good cause, not lessen and sink its intrinsick worth and value; and indifferent men will be ready to conclude it a falling cause which catcheth at such weak and unfaithfull holds. A good cause like a souldier (not well appointed) receives more hurt from the reggs of its own rotten armour, then the bullet of an Adversary; is more disparag'd (I mean) by a weak and insufficient defence, then a strong and subtile argument, (which is often thought to hold more of the pregnancy of the disputant then the cause.

1 Pet. 4.14.

Secondly,

Secondly, *Judgements extraordinary overtaking persons, evidently guilty of extraordinary crimes, are to be regarded as the evidences of Gods providence, and high displeasure against those sins.* God generally commits all spiritual judgement to his Son, and all temporal judgement to the Magistrate (who therefore hath Gods title, and is said to judge in his stead.) But sometimes (as Kings, who yet have their Vice-gerents) he is pleased to sit as it were in open judicature himself, and to correct a high and daring crime, with his own immediate stroke. Which he doth either when the sword of justice is permitted to rust in its scabbard, and the Magistrate neglects to put open wickedness to shame, or when perhaps he is unable, through a want of knowledge or power to reach the criminal; or in his total absence, thus in the primitive times, when the Magistrate (being Heathen) thought not any sin against the Gospel, to be *fori sui*, he invested his publick Ministers with a power which reach'd εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκὸς, to the affliction or destruction of the flesh, upon bold and hopeless offenders. 2 Cor. 10. 6. 1 Cor. 5. 5.

Now these judgements extraordinary, are Vocal and Emphatical, and call for our more serious notices in three cases especially;

1. *When the judgement bears upon it the evident portraitures and figures of the sin.* The cross men bear (like that of our Saviour) often carries the inscription of the crime in such plain and legible characters, that he that runs may read it. There are some herbs which bear upon them *Naturæ signaturas*, certain signatures and marks stamp'd upon them by the hand of Nature, serving (as a kinde of native labels) to tell us what vertues they contain, and whereby it may be known (even upon sight) to what diseases or parts of the body ill affected, they are proper and usefull (because bearing some figures or colours analogous to them) thus punishment sometimes carries *signaturas peccati*, and proclaims by its very make and fashion, what sin it is intended to discover and cure in us: And this it doth either when there is a ταὐτοπάθεια, a suffering in the very same instances and ways wherein men sinn'd; and the cross is (as it were) shap'd out of the forbidden tree whereby they offended. Thus *Davids* adultery was punish'd in *Absaloms* incest; *Pharaoh* who would have all the males drown'd, was himself drown'd; and the wickedness of *Abimelech* in slaying his 70 brethren was returned upon his own head in that strange and violent death whereby he perish'd. God is pleased so frequently to punish men thus, that the * Prophets often seem to foretell a judgement, rather by a rational attendance to the condition of the sin, then by a Divine *afflatus*. * In such examples of Divine justice, Gods *rod hath a voice* as well as a smart, and it becomes us to be his notice-takers, and not (with the *Philistines*, 1 Sam. 6. 9.) nickname the most apparent hand of God, a chance which hath happened; and that we may Judg. 9. 56. *If. 33. 1. Jer. 24. 17. Joel 3. 7, 8. 1 Sam. 15. 33. Hab. 2. 6. Obad. ver. 15, 16. Mic. 1. 7. Jer. 48. 26, 27.

* *Quod evidentius Dei judicium esse potuit, quàm ut triumphum præsumens, triumphus fieret, &c. & ut quicquid se facturum usurpârat, ipse pateretur?* Salv. de Gub. Dei. l. 5. speaking of the Rom. Capt.

not

not be thought to censure our Brother, turn charitable Atheists. Or 2. the judgement may proclaim the sin, when there is an *Omoiomêrism*, when the judgement seems the symbol of the sin, and justice pays men in value though not in kinde. Thus God threatned the Israelites, that as they *had served strange Gods in their own land, so should they serve strangers in a land not their own.* *Solomon* serv'd God with a divided heart, and but half his Kingdom goes to his posterity. When we see the scandalous sinner corrected thus by his own wickedness, and made even to drink the dust of his own Idol, we should make a pious meditation on the occasion.

Jer. 5. 19.

V. M. Medes Serm. on Jud. 1. 7.

2. *When the judgement surpriseth the sinner in the very acting of his wickedness*, and sin the off-spring destroys its parent (as it is said of the viper) in the very production. When the false swearer is immediately stricken by God, and the blasphemers tongue suddenly curst into silence, and death sent to make the Oppressour vomit up his newly stollen morsels, when *Herod* and *Nebuchadnezzar* have their sin and punishment bearing an equal date, (In short) when justice thus lays aside its leaden feet, and treads close upon the heels of the offender; God intends to learn us some great lesson in the example; and it is a signe we are past feeling if we can see him thus cutting off now one and then another member of our common body without some shrinking, and religious sense thereof in our selves.

3. *When the judgement is such as the general experience of times proves the usual consequent of such a crime.* As a sudden and untimely death of sedition, the ruine of estates of Sacriledge, an antedated and diseased old age of riot and drunkenness, an almost general impenitency of uncleanness, a naked and expos'd posterity of oppression and unrighteous gain, strange discoveries and an infamous death of bloud shed, neglect and scorn of men of a great ambition, the blasting of designs which proceed upon the violation of the religion of national compacts, an untimely and strange death of cruel and bloudy persecutions. Gods *judgements* are generally a *great deep* (the reasons of them past our sounding) but *his righteousness is sometimes as the great mountains*, visible to the dullest eye, in the judgements where with he corrects, those sins especially which fall most directly cross to his government of the world.

It will become us now to own our selves המזכרים את־יהוה *Gods Recorders* to register in a pious remembrance all such great displays of his justice in the world. Such extraordinary judgements are intended Gods testimonies to his providence and righteousness, and the writing of them in the dust, is none of the least causes of Atheism in the world. And therefore a learned Personage (not without good reason) reports it as a great defect, that there is not yet extant an *Historia Nemesews*, a judicious and well attested history of the divine vengeance, containing the most remarkable monuments of Gods justice, in which it might appear how *evil hath hunted*, (as it were through many turnings of affairs and mazes of life) *the violent person* and at last *overthrew* him. A dull and stupid inobservance

Isa. 62. 6.

Verul. de Augm. Scient. l. 2. c. 11.

Psal. 140. 11.

of

of ſuch examples of Divine juſtice (a looking at them all but as the caſual drops of miſery falling from that *common cup in the hand of God*, Pſal. 75. 8. indifferently upon good and bad,) ſtands often arraign'd in Scripture as a very great ſin. Pſal. 10. 5. 2ª. 4, 5. 59. 13. Iſa. 26. 11. 66. 24. Zeph. 3. 5. Job 34. 26, 27. Mic. 6. 9.

What hath been ſpoken (to prevent any corruption of judgement or practice) muſt be taken with a grain or two of ſalt.

1. *Where no particular ſin of any blacker die appears in the life of our afflicted Brother, we muſt not preſume from an inſpection of the condition and figures of the judgement, to draw up any particular charge againſt him.* We are not as ſoon as ever God *writes bitter things againſt* our neighbour (as *Job* phraſeth it) raſhly to undertake to expound the particular ſenſe and meaning of the writing; leſt we call that a *ſcorpion*, which God intends a *rod*, and that an inſtance of wrath, which is intended but an exerciſe of Grace. Gods judgements often come forth upon errands which they to whom they are ſent, may better underſtand then perſons unconcern'd. We are not to conclude the puniſhment from the ſin, (*ſaying, Thus and thus hath ſuch a man done and it will come home by him*) this is to preſcribe time and meaſure to the juſtice of God; neither may we infer the ſin from the puniſhment (intituling ſome ſuch great evil of ſin to ſuch an evil of puniſhment) for God may give a good man his *evil*, as to a bad man his *good things*, in this world. But where we are as ſure from Scripture (not fancy, apt to abuſe us where our ſelves are concern'd) that the ſin is extraordinary, as we are from ſenſe that the judgement is ſuch, we may then cry out with the followers of the Lamb, Rev. 15. 4. *All nations ſhall worſhip before thee, O Lord, for thy Judgements are made manifeſt.* Chap. 13. 26.

2. *Care muſt be had that no ſuch obſervations be leaven'd with any uncharitable ſentence upon our Brothers final eſtate.* A great judgement on his body, may be intended a great mercy to his ſoul, and perhaps the ſhame and miſery of this life may commute for hell. *Uzza's* zeal might further the ſalvation of his ſoul, while the indiſcretion thereof brought a fearfull deſtruction upon his body.

SECT. II.

Prodigies Penal how to be interpreted.

Three concluſions more to direct to a right underſtanding in reference to Prodigies penal. *Four inſtances of Gods extraordinary judgements upon the adverſaries of his Goſpel. The ſingularity of Gods judgements upon the Jewiſh Nation, wherein appearing. Extraordinary judgements no concluſive arguments againſt a cauſe now, and why: Why uſually thought they are? The words of our Saviour,* Luk 13. 1, 2. *in reference to the Galileans, explain'd. The judgement upon them, whether a ſigne of the time to that generation? Leſſer National judgements, arguments*

to repentance no signs of the time. Temporal judgements on Nations more argumentative under the Old Testament then the New. Religious arguments to be managed with coolness and candour.

Concluſ. 3. THe third Concluſion to direct to a right underſtanding in reference to Prodigies *penal*, is this. *Judgements ſingular and miraculous, ſurpriſing perſons in defence of a cauſe, evidently devoted in Scripture to deſtruction, may be regarded as partial teſtimonies from heaven againſt it.* It is readily acknowledg'd that there is light enough in Scripture to diſtinguiſh doctrines and cauſes by, but yet where God hath been pleas'd by any ſuch mighty judgements to open the eyes of men to a clearer perception of it, and to hold them in a more ſerious attendance thereunto, they are not to overlook it, for fear they appear to ſeek a ſigne from heaven, or to offer weak men an encouragement to wreſt the darker works of Providence, (as they do the words of Scripture) to the ends of ſuperſtition and ſome little intereſts and Opinions to which they engroſs the favours of Heaven.

To ſerve the more diſtinct underſtanding of this concluſion, I ſhall propoſe theſe few examples.

1. When the Jews, in the aſſiſtance of *Julian* the Emperour, aſſayed the reſtoring of their ruin'd Temple and ſo to oppoſe *Moſes* to *Chriſt*, God miraculouſly determined the controverſy; for the fire (which uſed before, to come forth from him to conſume the ſacrifice, now) came and conſum'd their intended Temple, and Altars, deſtroyed the workmen about it, and their ſeveral inſtruments, and the whole deſigne was blaſted by ſuch terrible appearances of God againſt it, that many Jews were perſwaded by that viſible argument againſt Judaiſm, to entertain the faith of Chriſt.

Socrat. Hiſt. l. 3. c. 17.

2. That terrible fire which iſſued out of the ground in the ſecond year of *Titus* (not long after the deſtruction of *Jeruſalem* and the Jewiſh Temple) and laid in aſhes the Temples of *Jupiter Capitolinus, Neptune, Iſis, Serapis, the Pantheon, &c.* and their other devoted places, was ſo ſtrange an inſtance, that the * Ethnick Hiſtorian makes this judgement thereupon, *Malum id divinum potiùs quàm humanum videtur fuiſſe*, and was (in all likelihood) regarded by the Chriſtians of that time, as a ſigne that no cauſe or Religion (Ethnick or Jewiſh) ſhould be able to ſtand before the Chriſtian; and that the day foretold, wherein * *God would famiſh all the Gods of the earth, and men ſhould worſhip him, every one from his place, even all the iſles of the heathen*, was juſt now a dawning.

* Dio. Hiſt. l. 66. Zeph. 2. 11. *Poſtquam Imp Rom. cœperunt de induſtria, Chriſtianos abſterrere à Chriſto, nunquam illis bene fuit, aut pauci eorum aut nullus ferè ſiccâ morte deſcendit ad Generum Cereris.* Camero. de verb. Dei. p. 444.

3. That almoſt conſtant ſucceſſion of * Romane Emperours, whoſe robes (for the ſpace of three hundred years) were dy'd in their own bloud ſhed by the hand of violence, ſeems an *inſtantia monadica* in Providence, and to carry much of a miracle with it; and may be receiv'd as an argument of Gods controverſy with them for the butchering of ſo many of his innocent ſheep, under their bloudy government. (though perhaps ſome will entertain the example but with common thoughts, becauſe of the circumſtances the Empire was then in.)

4. There

4. There is no Nation under heaven whose sins God hath visited upon them with a judgement of so private and reserv'd a condition, as that of the Jews, whether respect be had, to the *nature* or *season* thereof.

1. There is a singularity therein in regard of the *nature of it*. *Jew* is become throughout the whole world, rather *nomen Odii quam Gentis*. They are now as much scatter'd over the World, as before impal'd and distinguisht from it. They alone live in banishment, wheresoever they come. Now their becoming thus (like *Cain*) vagabonds and fugitives upon earth, (which no Nation besides is) speaks them like him gone out of Gods presence, and guilty of some horrible murder, even no less then that of the *Lord of life*, which the scripture chargeth upon them.

Ποῖον ἔθνος μεταναστὰς ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδίας μητροπόλεως, καὶ τὸ οἰκεῖον τοῦτο, τὴν πατρῴαν θρησκείαν ἢ μόνοι Ἰουδαῖοι; Orig. Cont. Celf. l. 2.

2. There is a singularity in the judgement upon them, in regard of the *Season* thereof. For before they had stain'd their hands in the bloud of the Lord of the Temple, their Temple (though sometimes defac'd) was never made vile and contemptible by any abomination of the heathen, set up in the most Holy. *No war, no sedition, no captivity, no vastation, nor any other sad occasion whatsoever, made so great a wast upon the religion and reverence of that place, that an idol or image* (against the essential sanctity thereof) *should be tendered to worship therein* (as *Agrippa* in his Embassy to *Caius* the Emperour largely tells him) for that the very heathens had been tutor'd into a reverence thereof, by those fearful judgements, which (as he there tells him) they had observed the King of heaven alway avenging any lesser indignities offer'd to that his chamber of special presence; But no sooner had they committed *that wonderfull and horrible thing*, but God delivers the place of his ancient habitation, the desire of their eyes, to the defilements and dishonour of an image that the Emperour, erected in the Holy of Holies, as a sign that *place* should no longer *be his rest because it was polluted*, and that he had forsaken both it and them. Moreover, most constant were the judgements which *at last* befel the enemies of the Jewish Nation, before their great sin of rejecting the son of God. *Israel was* then *holiness to the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase, all that devour'd him did offend, evil came upon them from the Lord.* Whereas afterward so constant their successes, when attempting upon them, as if to fight against that nation, were the only way of obliging victory, and the assistances of God. Which singularity in the divine judgements, was a sign that God had now put a period to the Jewish worship, and that their putting of Christ to death, lookt of a blacker colour in the eyes of Justice, as procureing more dreadfull evils upon them then all their other sins could ever doe.

Οὐ σάσις, οὐ πόλεμος, οὐχ ἅλωσις, οὐ πόρθησις, οὐκ ἄλλο τῶν ὁμοίων οὐδὲν ἐνεωλίεισε πότε ὅπως εἰς τὸν νεὼν ὡς ἄγαλμα, ἢ ξόανον, ἢ τι τῶν χειροκμήτων ἱδρύσαιτο, &c. Philo. Jud. de legat. ad Caium Imp. Mic. 2. 10. Jer. 2. 3. Vid. D. *Jackson Creed.* l. 1. c. 19. & c. 23.

I easily foresee how ready some persons may be to build *hay and stubble upon* this *foundation*, and to conclude such a cause or party branded from heaven, if any judgement (like an executioner in a vizard) *frightfull* as well as *fatall*, befall the persons appearing in defence thereof. And therefore I must here minde them how inconsequent any such reasonings can be, not only because I more then

doubt whether any of the judgements they can instance in touch in any points and angles of similitude those already mention'd, and because they came not forth to decide causes collaterally, but diametrically oppos'd (not differences between *Paul* and *Cephas*, *but God and Belial*) but because Judaism and Gentilism were causes evidently devoted in sacred scripture, and the judgements following them were but the accomplishments of its predictions, and the executions of a scripture sentence upon them. But we have now no better warrant to infer the goodness or badness of some lesser causes and opinions men espouse, from the judgements which may sometimes overtake the assertors of them, then to make judgement of the loyalty of a wife, by a *water of jealousie*. For as sometimes the *Person* may fall in the cause (because that is displeasing to God) thus *Josiah* fell in the expedition against the King of Egypt; so sometimes the *cause* may fall in the person (because he is displeasing to God) as the Israelites in the controversy with the men of *Benjamin*. Besides, we are to presume that God speaks to us more plainly by his providence, then by his word, wherein he hath permitted some lesser matters to stand in a very doubtfull light, to engage us to an exercise of our *understandings* to find the truth, and of our *charities* to those who (having not such strong and excercised senses as our selves) chance to mistake it.

It were therefore heartily to be wisht, that men had that *largeness of heart*, as not to think heaven and earth concern'd in the standing or falling of their little interests and perswasions; that they would leave off (that worst kind of enclosure) the entailing salvation solely upon their own party; and not goe about to hedge in the Holy Dove, by appropriating the graces and influences thereof to themselves. For then men would not be so prone to believe Gods judgements design no higher then the service of their little passions and animosities, and that he is as little able to forbear and make allowance for the mistakes and infirmities of men, as themselves.

Conclus. 4. *Personal judgements extraordinary, are to be regarded as Gods visible sermons of repentance to a multitude under the guilt of the same or greater sins.* The great *Lord of Hosts*, sometimes decimates a multitude of offenders, and discovers in the personal sufferings of a few what all deserve, and may (without repentance) expect: Now as the ends of brands are noted to shed forth their tears in a kind of sad sense of the loss of those parts which the fire hath already seaz'd, thus they which are (in the phrase of scripture) as *brands pluckt* (for the present) *out of the fire*, should express a christian sense of the falls and of the sins of those persons which God was pleas'd to make their proxies in correction. Great judgements are not to be interpreted so much the *signs* of our brothers sins, as the *reproofs* of our own. Because the pregnant example of the *Galileans* [occurring Luk. 13.] may lend a great light and strength both to the particular *conclusion* before us, and our general argument, it will be no undervaluing of our pains to paraphrase a little upon our Saviours words upon the occasion.

Vers. 1.

Vers. 1. *There were present at that time, some that told Him of the Galileans, whose bloud* Pilate *had mingled with their sacrifices.*

2. *And* Jesus *answering said unto them suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things?*

3. *I tell you nay but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

Ὡσαύτως ἀπολεῖσθε] which words I choose (with *Grotius*) to render, *ad modum eundem, after the same manner,* for I conceive our Saviour doth not vary his speech [vers. 5.] when discoursing of those which perisht by the tower of *Siloam,* thus [ὁμοίως ἀπολεῖσθε] ye shall perish *ad modum similem, in a manner like them,* but upon some reason of moment, which I thus explain.

These *Galileans* were a faction of *Judas* of *Galilee* (of whom we read. Act. 5. 37.) whose great doctrine it was, that it was unlawfull φόρον τοῖς Ρωμαίοις τελεῖν, to pay tribute to the *Romanes,* or to acknowledge μετὰ τὸν θεὸν ἄλλους δεσπότας, any mortal Lords after God had been their King, or to offer sacrifice for the Romane Governours: Now *Pilate* (provokt by the dishonours or the dangers wrapt up in this doctrine) stains the Altar with the bloud of these seditious sacrificers, setting upon them now come to *Hierusalem* to attend the religion of the paschal rites. Now this personal judgement was a little Map wherein the lines and figures of that terrible calamity which afterward fell upon the whole Nation, were excellently represented; some of them perishing *ad modum eundem,* and others *ad modum similem.* For as these Galileans perisht on the feast of Pasover in a sedition varnisht over with the specious colours and pretences of religion and conscience, so did a great part of the Nation afterward fall in a rebellion against *Cæsar* for Gods sake, [*pious pretences that they especially were Abrahams children, God's free people, and to pay no sanctuary shekel to a Heathen Ruler.*] and that on the very pasover day, in the Temple the place of sacrifice. And the persons upon whom the *Tower of Siloam fell,* were a kind of type of the many thousands besides, which perisht in the ruins of the City (of which that Tower carried the image and representation) in which they were surpriz'd by the Roman army; so that they did perish [ὁμοίως] in a manner similar unto them.

Joseph. de Bel. Judaic. l. 2. c. 12.

Vid. Grot. in loc.

Concerning which strange examples, I must confess I see no reason to receive them (with the Reverend D. *Jackson*) absolutely and in themselves consider'd, as any intended *signs of the time* to that Generation; nor doe I think the Jews had any ground to think those sad accidents τύποι σωθέντων ἐκείνοις happened unto them as any true and proper *types* and figures of an analogous destruction to fall upon themselves in the revolution of a few years: for could any mere man certainly foresee, or but suspect, that any such storms and shours of evils would suddainly fall upon the Jewish state, upon the rising of this cloud *no bigger then a mans hand* (the death of a few private and inconsiderable persons?) As a forain Divine speaking of the English art of preaching said truly, *plus est in Artifice quam in arte,* it derives more from the Artist, then any set rules of art; so we may say upon our Saviours prophecies and foresight expresst upon this occasion,

In Serm. on Luk. 13. 1, 2, 3.

plus fuit in significante quam in signo. His prophetick paraphrase upon that sign, gave it that significancy and expressiveness, which of it self it had not; the type speaking no more (without the divine gloss and sanction) then the smiting of any King upon the ground three times with an arrow, now, signifies that he shall smite his enemies three times, because the the instance was once by Gods appoyntment) a happy *Omen* of such a blessing to a King of Israel.

2 Kings 13. 18.

But howsoever, the Jews ought to have seen the sword of God in the hand of *Pilate*, in that sad example, to have consider'd that while he (like the leech) drew all this bloud to serve his own bloudy and revengfull Nature, the great Physitian intended it as medicinal to the body of the nation, to teach them the wisdom of a speedy repentance therein, least a like or greater judgement *should* surprize themselves: and the rather, because so guilty of the same sin [the hiding of the *sword* of sedition in the *Ephod* of religion and conscience toward God] and not seeing their fellows secur'd from the arrest of Judgement by the religion of an Altar, and the prerogative of a Temple. All Gods judgements upon others, come forth upon purposes of grace, and are intended but as the cutting and lancing of one member, to draw away the corrupt humours from the rest.

Concluſ. 5.

Fifthly, *Lesser national judgements are to be regarded as the signs of Gods present displeasure, and as his summons to repentance.* Scripture makes mention of Gods *cutting of a Nation short* [2 Kings 10. 32.] and of his *cutting of them off* [Jer. 44. 11.] the instruments whereby he doth the former, are *very intemperate seasons, murrains of cattle, Epidemical diseases, long dearths, great defeats of Armies*, &c. For as there are *Vitia Hominum & vitia Temporum*, the vices and follies of men taken asunder, and of men consider'd as a body, and under such common and moveable circumstances; so there are *Mala Hominum*, the evils which fall upon the lots of private men, and *Mala temporum*, the evils of the Times, the Judgements which ceaze and touch men as united and meeting in one common body and intereſt and under the guilt of some publick and National impiety.

1 Joel. 12.

Now these are I say to be received, by the common sense of a Nation, as Gods warning pieces to come in and submit themselves to him, by repentance, least he storme them by some more black and terrible judgement. For God sometimes deals by Nations as with persons, who are first brought to a *Council*, next to a *Judgement*, then *to hell-fire.* The *great day of destruction from the Almighty* (foretold by the Prophet) was usher'd by these lesser evils, the *cutting off the meat from before their eyes, the rotting of the seeds under the clods*, &c. And before God *layd the Axe to the root of* that fair *tree* [the Jewish Church) he was pleased many years to chop and prune it by those (ἀρχὰς ὠδίνων) many little and preludory Judgements, that its unfruitfulness might be corrected. And that showr of vengeance which at last overwhelm'd the *Romane Empire*, was prefac'd by some smaller drops. It lay long in the fire of many heavy afflictions, but (like the clay whereby it is emblem'd Dan. 2. 42.) it lost nothing of its impure and drossy nature, and at last this incorrigibleness brought on

Joel. 1. 15. 17.

Nullam penitus Romani Orbis aut Romani nominis partem, quamlibet graviter plagis cæsam unquam fuisse correctam, &c. Salv. l. 5. De Gub. Dei.

on its final ruine and execution by the Barbarous Nations of the North.

I say not, that these instances can warrant us alway to receive all such lesser judgements, as the tokens and harbingers of much greater, and (to borrow the language of the Prophet) *as the swellings out in a high wall, whose breaking is coming suddenly*: For God often makes great sins the triumphs of his goodness, and lays a very sad ground (in some lesser evils) when he purposeth to lay on his *fair colours* of peace and happiness. He causeth it sometimes *at even* (when darker and blacker times were expected) *to be light*. Besides, the unchurching or unpeopling of a Nation (his greater judgements) are ways which under this spiritual Oeconomy, the Divine Justice seldom walks in. God indeed heretofore, (when the world, in the greener years thereof, was most under the conduct of its lower faculties, and most apt to be drawn or driven by rewards or punishments temporal) singled out the Jewish Nation, in whose outward state of prosperity or adversity, to read visible lectures of Divinity and obedience to the Nations round about; and that the Nations might take the fairer view of their state God tells them, Ezek. 5. 5, 6, 7, 8. that he had plac'd *Jerusalem* in the midst of the Nations round about her: and that they might call the eyes of the world the more upon them, their plagues were such as scarce admitted their parallel instances. But God chooseth now generally to punish incorrigibleness under temporal by spiritual judgements. He sometimes delivers a people (like *Samson*) to blindness and stupidity, who having been often *bound by the cords of their* [Delilah] *sins* (as *Solomon* speaks) would never take warning. When ever therefore the smoke of Gods lesser judgements, speaks his *anger to be kindled but a little*, we are to express a quick sense thereof, and endeavour its quenching by a speedy removal of the fuel those National sins which may continue and increase it. God will account with men one day, not onely for the abuse of National mercies, but National judgements.

Isa. 30. 13.
Isa. 43. 24. 54. 11.
Τὸ δὲ ἐθνῶν ἁπάντων, τοῦτο (τῶν Ἰουδαίων) ἔθνος, θεογνωσίας ἐχεγγύους Διδάσκαλον ὁ Θεός. Theodor. Orat. 10. de Provid.
Lam. 4. 6.
Mat. 24. 21.
Prov. 5. 22.

And thus (by Gods assistance) have I issued my meditations upon both parts of the Argument, and offered the best defence I could to the cause I undertook (too just and good to be lost for a *Nihil dicit*) Upon a review whereof, I am not conscious to my self of having trespass'd against the Apostolical precept by *returning* upon our Adversaries *railing for railing*, and of giving any suspicion of the weakness of my cause or Arguments, by calling in passion or reproaches to their relief and assistance. They which think an argument pierceth the less, because not manag'd with some keeness of style, may as well think a rasour cuts the worse, for having its rough and grating edge a little taken off. The truth is, I apprehended not any such mountainous difficulties at any time in my way, that I should need (like *Hannibal* in the *Alps*) to force a passage through them with fire and vineger, (any hot and tart expressions and reflections.)

1 Pet. 3. 9.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

The Concluſion.

The Omiſſion of a particular enquiry into the truth and conſequence of ſome late ſtrange relations, excuſed. The undertaking proved needleſs, difficult, unprofitable. *Relations of matters wonderfull why greatly liable to ſuſpicion. The Caution of the ſuperſtitious Heathens in receiving ſuch ſtories, noted. Men moſt apt to be abuſed with ſuch relations, where Religion is concerned in them. The excellent manner of relating wonders, in Sacred Writ. The conviction of an Enthuſiaſt or a Superſtitious perſon, why greatly difficult. Projectours almoſt in every Science. Why ſo readily attended to? The Philoſophical ſtudy of Prodigies commended. An acquieſcence in the preſent diſpenſations of Providence, an effectual remedy againſt curioſity.*

IT might poſſibly be expected that this diſcourſe ſhould have touch'd more cloſely upon the occaſion, and have come to a more diſtinct view, and particular examination of (at leaſt) ſome of thoſe ſtrange relations which of late, have been preſt upon the faith of the Nation, with ſo great a confidence, and ſo troubleſom an importunity. An undertaking which I purpoſely declined, looking at it as *Needleſs*, *Difficult*, and *Unprofitable*.

First, *As* in it ſelf, *Needleſs*: For, (beſides that I think it hard to finde a faith that can ſwallow any ſuch Camel-ſtories, as many of them in all the circumſtances with which they are ſwell'd out, appear to be) there are no relations in the world, which we may with greater reaſon, arreſt upon ſuſpicion of impoſture, then ſuch as theſe are. And that

1. *Becauſe of the ignorance of the greater part of their Atteſtours, in natural Philoſophy.* Now where men look upon an object (ſtrange and prodigious) through ſo groſs and thick a *medium*, it is no treſpaſs againſt charity to believe they ſometimes report them beyond their proper and juſt figures and dimenſions. It is the nature of ignorance *fingere ſimul & credere.*

2. *Religion ſeems much concerned in ſuch relations.* Now men (like *Jacob*) will be ready to venture upon a lie for a great bleſſing [the advancement of Religion] Beſides, as Atheiſm gives all events to the ſecond, ſo Superſtition (Religion ſcar'd out of its wits) gives all ſolely to the firſt cauſe, and is therefore quickly perſwaded to fill out its relations with all the examples of wonderfull and extraordinary, that effects may appear the more worthy of the immediate power of God. Moreover, blinde and ignorant fears of God, make the minde impreſſive to any kinde of religious Legends. Never was the world more truly Δενσιδαιμονιῶν καὶ σοφισμάτων χώρα, (as *Philo* ſtyles it) a *Region of lies and fallacies*, then in the more dark and ruder times of Gentiliſm and Popery, when an ignorant devotion toward God had made Religion almoſt nothing but a continued hiſtory of *prodi-*

gies,

gies, apparitions, miracles, voices from the clouds, and the like: and therefore the Lord *Bacon*, adviſing a juſt *hiſtory of Prodiges*, to direct to the true interpretation of Nature and knowledge of cauſes, gives in this prudent Caveat, *Maximè habenda ſunt pro ſuſpectis quæ pendent quomodocunque à Religione, ut prodigia Livii, &c.* (Superſtition (as it is ſaid of the viper) bites off that head, weakens and ſoftens that faculty of reaſon, by which it did at firſt conceive, and makes it receptive of any odd fancies and impreſſions. Nov. Organ. l. 2. Aphor. 29.

3. *The ſtrength of theſe Relations* (like that of *Niſus* in the Poet) *lies* generally *in the weak hair of ſome ſingle or double teſtimony.* Now as there is little reaſon to conceive a whole Nation concern'd in the viſions of one or two private perſons, if they were true (Gods ſigns and wonders which were intended as leſſons to a Nation, or poſterity, being generally atteſted by numbers;) ſo as little reaſon to hang the weight of ſo ſerious a faith and great affections in Religion upon ſo ſlender a wire, as the teſtimony of one, perhaps two, or three men (in ſuch matters) is. The *Romanes* of old, though as apt to ſwallow ſuch prodigious ſtories as any, yet uſed to chew them firſt by a ſerious examination (ſometimes by the publick Magiſtrate) made of the credit of the Atteſtours, and truth of the Relations. And we ſhall finde (*in Livy*) prodigious accidents ſometimes paſt by without any religious regards, *viz.* where the teſtimony appear'd incompetent; and this, leſt what was intended a devotion to their Deities, might chance to prove a mockery.

4. *Some men ſeem even naturally*, fabularum proci, *the very courters of fables and Legends.* Either *out of a native vanity and emptineſs of minde*, whereby (like the *Cameleon*) they are better pleaſed with aery then ſubſtantial nouriſhment: or *a mean kinde of ambition* of being look'd at and ſtared upon by the ruder multitude, who (in all likelihood) would neglect them if their books and diſcourſes were not ſomewhat antick and extraordinary. Hence the men can ſcarce relate any matter (eſpecially, if going a little off from common and quotidian) but it muſt look big, and borrow ſomewhat of a Romance. *Quidam incredibilium relatu, commendationem parant, & Lectorem aliud acturum, ſi per quotidiana duceretur, miraculo excitant. Quidam creduli, quidam negligentes, quibuſdam mendacium obrepit, quibuſdam placet.* Sen. Nat. Qu. l. 7. c. 16.

Very obſervable therefore, the manner of the relation of any great wonders, in Sacred Writ; wherein we ſhall finde the moſt glorious diſplays of the Divine power, delivered in that ſimplicity and coolneſs of ſtyle, in that lax and general way, with as little of ecſtacy and emotion of minde appearing in the Relatour, as if ſome vulgar and quotidian occurrence had fallen before him: that ſo there might not appear any ſymptoms of that common itch in men to tell ſtrange ſtories, or any affectation of ſtrangeneſs and the common wonder, or a great ſolicitouſneſs to raiſe the eſteem of that cauſe or party, to which they were an honourable teſtimony from heaven, in the minds of men.

Secondly, *Such an undertaking would prove exceeding difficult.* It being much more eaſy to beleeve many a ſtrange ſtory, then to attempt its refute; eſpecially where the Scene thereof is laid at a great diſtance off. Beſides, very difficult it is to make any ſteady judgement

of some Prodigies, without an actual presence to them; such are *the water of ponds, or fountains turn'd* (as it is pretended) *into blood, the interruption of the current of rivers, some spots as of blood, discovered upon stones or statues, &c.* the causes of which appearances, will scarce be ever hit, by persons which stand at a great distance, and understand not the condition of the season, climate, water, earth, when and where the events fell out.

3. *The undertaking would have proved very unserviceable to our main purpose,* for,

1. Our designe was not the disparagement of the Persons of our Adversaries (of which any attempt upon their credit would have been indicted) but of their cause.

2. A solicitous enquiry into the truth of the Relations, would have been concluded a tacit acknowledgement of the value and significancy of them, if they should chance to prove truths.

3. Having cut off the neck of this Opinion [those precarious principles it holds of] a cutting off the particular heads, [monstrous relations] which grow upon it, would be *needless*; nay *endless*, for others would quickly rise up in their places.

4. We have (as *Tarquinius* did the heads of the taller poppies) directly struck at the credit and significancy of the most eminent and pretending Prodigies, [*Comets and Apparitions*]

5. I conceiv'd that more words would have been but lost upon persons, which (after all that hath been said) have a great devotion for this ancient Idol [*the Opinion of Presages by Prodigies.*] *Speculative errours* generally *scorn* the truth, practical errours *hate* it, but it is the usage of Superstition and Enthusiasm to *fear* it: because in the two former, *self onely*, but in the latter *God* is presum'd especially concern'd; All the images and fictions of the brain (like those in the fancies of Poets) being translated presently into heaven, and Gods honour and counsels thought to stand or fall with them.

Philosophi superstitiosi & pene Fanatici, quidvis malle videntur quàm se esse ineptos. Tul. de Div. l. 2.

6. Because as for persons of more free and unengaged minds, and that use not to believe without asking themselves *why*, I was not without some hopes that what hath been already discours'd in this Argument, may suffice to their resolution and satisfaction. Upon all which accounts, I did not conceive it necessary to concern my self in any solicitous enquiries into the truth or falshood of particular relations, or a tedious discovery of the lightness and insignificancy of them singly, and apart; and so to kill this Superstition (as they do some kinde of vermin) by parts and pieces.

After all that hath been already said, before I conclude the Readers task and my own, I conceive it necessary to call him to a notice of that strong and almost catholick propension in our nature, (against the reproaches even of our understanding part, and the loud voice of a great experience) to entertain with a kinde of sacred regard, persons who assume to themselves an ability to do or know hugely beyond the common standard of humane attainments. Of which kinde of Mountebanks, there never wanted examples in all Arts and

and Sciences. *In Astronomy*, we are detain'd with the vain words of some that tell us of a *Scriptura cœlestis*, of the fates and destinies of Nations and Princes, the issues of any great Actions, written upon the great scroll of heaven, and plainly legible by the *Sons of Art*: of a way and method of deriving down and continuing the vertues of Planets and Constellations in certain images prepared according to art. *In Natural Philosophy*, we are as much abused by others, which tell us of a way to procure Prophetical dreams, to exalt all bodies into gold, to make mighty impressions upon the air, to advance imagination to a capacity of working wonders both upon the minds of men, and (even greatly distant) bodies: of an art to read and expound all the cryptick *lines* in your hand and face. *In Medicks*, we have some confident undertakers to rescue the Science from all its reproaches and dishonours, nay to cut off the very entail of death from mankinde. *In Science in General*, we meet with some of the sons of pride which tell us of an *Ars magna*, a *Pansophia*, a method to bless man with the real substance of that happiness [*A universal knowledge*] the catching at whose vain and flying shadow cost him the loss of Paradise. *In Divinity, Gad, behold a troup cometh of* persons which begin their enquiries where all wise men make an end [Cabalists, pretenders to Revelations, to an understanding *of signs, and mysterious prophecies, strange providences, things to come, the pretended mysteries wrapt up in the sacred numbers and names, the intent and meaning of Prodigies, some more spiritual discoveries and mysterious notions in Religion*, &c.

All which pretenders to a τι θειοτερον, somewhat beyond the common size of humane ability, men are easily perswaded into great thoughts of, either because *in magnis vel voluisse mirandum*, or because all these pretences are but the many and various repeats of that first and most inviting temptation [the promise of a more rais'd and excellent knowledge, then we have already] or because the general ignorance of such pretenders, helps them to set off their wares and themselves, with a great *confidence*, which hath the power of fascination upon weaker minds, persons not secured by the countercharm of a great knowledge and resolution.

And therefore I think it not safe to trust the constancy of our minds against all opinion of Prophecies, Omens, Signs of times, Presages by Prodigies, as also those other *Splendidæ nugæ* (nearly related to them) just now mentioned, solely with reason and argument. It is a little necessary to confront a kinde of sullen resolution, *against*, to an almost obstinate propension of minde *towards* them. And if men would once value their Understandings so far, as to call all such husky and curious arts and studies (as the *Chaldee Oracle* doth all divinations, by the *Exta*, the motions of birds, smoke, &c.

--- Ἀδύματα πάντα

Ἐμπεσόντα ἀπάτης σπέρματος ---.

but the recreations and entertainments of children, and the weak supports of the gainfull trade of cheating and imposture, they would all (like fables which want Auditours) quickly sink into darkness

and silence: but as long as there are any persons in the world *troubled with the fits of the first Mother* (curiosity and pride) there will never be wanting some that will thrust any such rotten and unsavoury stuff under their noses.

If men were once perswaded into a great resolution against all such subtile vanities, and difficult impertinences, the price of real and substantial wisdom would quickly rise in the world; and the *Tree of Knowledge* (these suckers which are ready to starve it, being once thrown off) would thrive and spread; men, when they came to discourse, would be more sure of each others principles; and Religion would be no longer render'd to the neglect and scorn of subtile men, because appearing to them but a cold form of some pitifull modes and observations, a system of blind fears, or lean and ignorant imaginations.

What hath been hitherto discourst (if it any where seem to hit) hath not been at all levell'd against the *Philosophical study* of Prodigies, or intended any disparagement of all sober inquiries *into*, or history of the *Heteroclita Naturæ*, preternatural generations, or any *instantiæ variantes* either in Heaven or Earth. It is to be wisht that there were a kind of Philosophy-office, wherein all such unusual occurrences were registred; not in such fabulous and antick circumstances wherein they stand recorded in the writers of Natural Magick (designing nothing but wonder in their Readers) nor with a superstitious observation of any such dreadfull events with which such relations are usually stain'd, in the writers which intend a service to religion in them: But in such faithfull notices of their several circumstances, as might assist the understanding to make a true judgement of their Natures and Occasions. Such a History would serve the reprehension of several maximes in *Philosophy*, deliver'd upon a scanty and hasty inspection of Nature (as presented to view but in some one posture) and would give Religion a freedom from its more dangerous (because less suspected Adversary) *Superstition*: for as a distinct and full view of second causes, begets *religion*; (because necessarily directing the eye, at last, upon the *First*) a superficial and imperfect notice, *Atheism*, (which like the bat is noted to flie abroad in the the twilight, in a kind of middle state between the darkness of ignorance and light of knowledge) so, an utter ignorance of causes natural, leads (in more soft and impressive minds, especially) to *superstition*, a slavish observance of and blind devotion toward God.

Verulam. de Augm. Scien. l. 2. c. 2.

All the words therefore which have been bestow'd upon this argument, have been directed solely to the discourageing of a *superstitious study* of the singularities in nature, and all regards of them as *Prognosticks* of any future evils, and approaching alterations in the state. Which that they may take the readier hold of the Reader (even blunt nayls will enter a soft and yielding matter) I doe with a great seriousness recommend to his affections and endeavours, *A perfect complacency & acquiescence in all the present allotments of divine providence.* For it is only when men are sick of things present, that they long for variety, and therefore have a very forward faith and affection for whatsoever

whatsoever prophecies and signs seem to give them the hopes and promises thereof. As *Nature* hath seated in some bodies a kind of restless desire of change, and motion from their present state, *so humour*, (or interest) hath plac'd in some minds a kind of perpetual motion, an eternal desire of change and alteration: And therefore *Prophecies, Omens, Stories of Prodigies*, shall be readily attended *to* and contended *for*, for these things feed that humour, because encourageing in loosers the hopes of a better game by some new shuffling and cutting, and in all persons, not pleas'd with what pleaseth God, of a great change of affairs, in state.

Whereas a true *son of wisdom*, doth ἀσπάζεσθαι τὰ συμβαινοντα (as the Moralist speaks) heartily kiss and embrace all the issues of the divine wisdom and goodness: for he is not so vain *as to measure* the wisdom and goodness of all the results of Gods counsels by the reference they bear to the little ends, interests, or opinions of so inconsiderable a piece of the world as himself; or *to think* his two eyes can see more then those many in *the wheels* of providence; He believes all events to be either good in themselves, or in their ends and issues. And therefore he can live quietly *ex tempore*, and possess himself in peace though in destitution of any signs and tokens, common prophecies or prodigies to tell him news, and to read to him the history of a future time. Sollicitous inquiries into the condition of times to come, are *planted* by curiosity, *water'd* by a great disgust of things before us, and *receive increase* from weak fears in reference to *hereafter*; against all which *pestes animæ*, a quick and active perswasion *that the most High ruleth in the Kingdoms of men*, and his wisdom and goodness preside in all affairs of the world, is an easy and perfect Antidote; and by consequence, against all regards to prodigies, Prophecies, Omens, the *tokens* and expressions of them.

Ezek. 10. 12.

Dan. 4. 17.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

In PREFACE.

Pag. 3. l. 17. r. salving. p. 5. l. 7. after *usurp* insert *upon*.

In TRACT.

Pag. 6. l. 16. r. *born*. p. 11. l. 30. r. *upon* after *strike*. p. 15. l. 20. r. *and* for *so* instead of *because*. p. 16. l. 8 r. *it* after *make*. p. 17. l. 6. r. *is* for *was*. Et l. 18. r. *owning*. p. 22. l. 27. r. *out* after *laid*. p. 31. l. 8 r. *fiery*. l. 22. *pascitur*. p. 35. l. 8. insert *the words of* after *the*. p. 42. l. 12. r. *stands* after *world*. l. 13. pillows. p. 57. l. 17. place the comma after *thereupon*.